LAX OF POPLAR

By HIMSELF

LAX OF POPLAR

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William H. Lax.

Frontispiece.

LAX *of* POPLAR

THE STORY OF

A Wonderful
Quarter of a Century

TOLD BY

HIMSELF

ILLUSTRATED BY
ALFRED E. BESTALL
and with
FULL-PAGE PHOTOGRAPHS

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To MY WIFE

MY DEAR—

FOR MORE THAN A QUARTER OF A CENTURY

YOU HAVE BEEN

MY UNWEARYING, UNFAILING, UNGRUDGING
COMRADE AND HELPER

THANK YOU

FOREWORD

By C. ENSOR WALTERS,

General Secretary of the London Wesleyan Methodist Mission.

It is a privilege to write a Foreword to this amazing book. I use the word 'amazing' advisedly—for here is a record of life and work throbbing with reality and pulsating with life. In this book Lax of Poplar lives and there is revealed the secret of his great work for God and humanity.

At first a Foreword seems a superfluity, yet there are some things which ought to be said which Lax cannot say for himself. My authority must be first, my friendship with Lax. I welcomed him when he first came to London to join the staff of the West London Mission, and for five happy years we both worked together under the brilliant leadership of Hugh Price Hughes. Next, we both have been longer associated with the work of the London Mission than any other ministers; and further, as General Secretary of the London Mission, I am in a position to speak for our entire organization. We honour Lax as our senior missioner; his services on behalf of the poor and disinherited in London are unrivalled.

From the moment in which I learnt to know Lax,

I marked him out as an exceptional man—a man with a real touch of genius—a man you could not describe as ' Mr.' or ' Reverend.' Here was a man of native wit, inborn power, conspicuous courage and great resource. Here was a David ready to slay any number of Goliaths. My first opinions of Lax have been more than justified. He has proved himself to be a valiant and brilliant leader ; a right noble gentleman and ' gallant knight ' battling for the Lord.

Let it be noted that his qualities are not simply on the surface. He is a man who ' wears well ' ; who grows on you the more you know him ; a man who has gone from strength to strength. Having few early advantages, he has always been learning—a real student, a diligent reader of good and great books and an extraordinarily gifted observer of life. Added to this he is a great traveller—he has been to the ends of the earth, and his mind is richly stored. In the truest sense of the word he is a man of culture.

This is evidenced in his preaching, speaking, and lecturing. His twenty-five years' ministry in one church is proof of his preaching gifts. He is to-day by far the most popular man who occupies the pulpit of that church. In his preaching he makes the Bible live and enforces truth with dramatic power. These same gifts are demonstrated both in his platform speaking and lecturing. Put Lax of Poplar on his feet and even the dullest audience throbs with life !

But that is not all. There is behind this forceful

personality a deeply religious nature. Lax is a man whom you quickly discover possesses strong faith in God and humanity. He preaches a Gospel which he himself has experienced. His is the true Methodist note. I should call him a man with a ' burning heart.' Add to this the fact that he is a man of prayer. Alive to present-day movements and criticisms he yet has a childlike faith in the efficacy of prayer. Perhaps this is the real secret of his remarkable success ; but in addition it is surely this inner life which makes him so model a pastor and so efficient a minister. Public applause and platform power have not robbed him o his native simplicity. Knowing in his earlier life what poverty was, he remains a friend of the poor. He is great in the homes of his people and is beloved as few ministers have been. I have seen the light on the faces of the poor in the East End of London as they have welcomed Lax.

Lax makes clear in his book how much he owes to the Godlike folk amongst whom he was reared. I know that it is his wish, as it is mine, that an adequate tribute should be paid to the influence and help which he has received from his gracious wife. When Hugh Price Hughes, whom I assisted, joined Lax and his wife together in Holy Matrimony, there came into his life a marvellous influence and wonderful power. The world knows something of what General Booth owed to the saintly Catherine Booth. I do not hesitate to say that Lax owes more than one can express to his wife.

Mrs. Lax is a gracious woman, at one with her husband in all his work, and beloved by all with whom she comes into contact.

Lax deserves to be known far beyond the boundaries of Methodism. His exploits at Poplar should be an inspiration to multitudes. In days when pessimism, fear, and despair concerning Christian work in crowded city areas, characterize many excellent people, this book comes as a breath from the Hills of Hope. It is a clarion call to courage and to a nobler endeavour on behalf of disinherited and hard-pressed humanity.

TO THE READER

'STORY? God bless you, I have none to tell, sir!' pleaded the needy knifegrinder; and his predicament was much the same as mine when my friends, with admirable persistency, urged me, again and again, to set down my story in book form. They insisted that thirty years in the most fascinating centres of London —five years in West London and twenty-five years in East London—must surely have borne a harvest worth garnering.

I could not see it. A man's story, so I said, if at all, ought not to be printed until he was dead! This I believed.

But they would not have it. They came on again. Indeed, they found the title of the book, and suggested its chapters. This time, with my usual cowardice, I agreed with their suggestion, on the condition that someone else should write it. Better that than nothing, they said; but I ought to write it myself.

Whereupon I found myself in the quiescent condition of waiting to be carried—waiting for the muse or the mood that would take me to the task. At last it came. Like an irresistible tide it swept me along. The thirty years lived again—memory, reminiscence incident, all lived again—and this book is the result.

The stories that follow are simply a selection from a

great number that could be told. Some will never see the light. The ' best ' stories may never be breathed. One's lips are sealed. They are too intimate, or too sacred, ever to pass the lips of him who was privileged to share the secret. But, such as they are, they are sent forth as narratives from real life.

May I explain why I have written in the third person? I wanted to avoid the peculiar pitfall of autobiography. I shrank from the egotistic I, I, I ! You understand ? It is to be hoped that this scruple will affect neither the clearness nor the vigour of the narration.

Barrie talks of ' M'Connachie ' that other self of his. I wanted to see that other fellow, Lax, at his work. In the following pages I have laughed at him, cried with him, praised him, blamed him, and, now and again, heaved half-bricks at him !

If my younger brethren in the ministry do me the honour of reading these pages, and will endeavour, more or less, to follow the counsels and test the principles, I can promise them a career of absorbing fascination. There is no sport in the world half so glorious as pursuing a man to save him.

I acknowledge with grateful thanks the help and encouragement of my friends, the Rev. C. Ensor Walters, the Rev. R. Moffat Gautrey, the Rev. Henry High, the Rev. Thomas Tiplady, the Rev. W. E. Clapham, and the Rev. Smith T. Parr.

WILLIAM H. LAX.

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LAX OF POPLAR

PROLOGUE

'TAKE orf that damned collar, yer blarsted skunk!' The genial speaker was a sombre, lean, hungry-looking man of about thirty-five years of age. The person addressed was Lax of Poplar.

'Take orf that damned collar!' the man repeated, without waiting for reply. Apparently the clerical collar was like the proverbial red rag to the bull, for the angry flash of his dark eyes, and the subtle hiss accompanying his language, indicated the vitriolic malignancy of the fellow.

'Oh,' replied Lax, as soon as he had recovered his breath, 'and what difference will it make if I do take off the collar?'

'Why, for one thing, it will show that yer ashamed o' bein' a parasite, for that is what you and all yer class are. With over a million unemployed, we can do without the burden o' keepin' sich as yer!'

'Well, now, that's rather an interesting proposition,' said Lax, 'and I should like about a quarter of an hour to discuss it with you.'

So, with one hand on the man's arm, he made a move

away from the roar of the traffic in East India Dock Road to the comparative quiet of a side-street.

The minister and the Communist stood face to face.

'You call me a parasite,' said Lax.

'Yus, that's what yer are,' replied the other.

'By that, I take it, you mean one that lives on another—that renders no adequate service for his keep, since you would say that service is rent a man pays for his room on earth,' explained the minister.

'Yus, you've got it,' the other assented.

'Very well, may I ask what is your business?' inquired the minister.

'A cabinet-maker,' was the reply.

'Are you in work?' queried Lax.

'Yus. What's that to you?' hissed the Communist.

'Oh, a great deal. With so much unemployment about, I'm glad you've got a job; besides, I congratulate you on not being a parasite,' continued the other.

'So you're a worker in wood,' Lax went on, 'and, if you are a good workman, I expect you could show me some handsome things you have made.'

'What are yer gettin' at?' asked the Communist.

'Why, this,' replied the minister, 'I want to point out that we are both workers.'

'*You* a worker!' screamed the objector. 'Do yer mean to say that yer do anythin'?'

'Certainly,' answered Lax, 'I'm a worker in character, just as you are a worker in wood.'

'Just listen for a minute,' Lax continued. 'You will agree that human character has to be created—to be cultivated—just as much as a piece of wood; to be prepared, formed, carved to a particular shape, and fitted for the place it has to fill. And I think that you will agree, also, that a worker in the human spirit is as worthy of a place in the community as a worker in wood.'

'Well, wot then?' queried the Communist.

'Why, that is my job; I'm a worker; not in wood, but in what you will agree is even greater—that is, human character. That church over there is my workshop. For over twenty years I've been at it every day, and in that time (although I say it myself) I've turned out some fine bits of work. If you'll come with me, I'll introduce you to some of my friends. Some are the raw material, and others are pretty well finished articles. You follow me?'

'Some are young,' the minister continued, 'and I'm still working on them—guiding, helping, inspiring them. Others are older, but they will tell you that the gospel I've preached and the service I've rendered have combined to mould and shape their lives. Is it worth doing—to make a drunkard sober? Is it worth doing—to make a thief honest? Is it worth doing—to be a friend to a man in sickness, and sorrow, and distress?'

'Do yer mean to say that yer doin' all that?' asked the astonished Communist.

'Certainly; that's what I'm trying to explain,' replied Lax.

The fellow stood still for a minute in sheer bewilderment.

'Well, I apologize for wot I said,' he replied. 'Will yer shake hands with me?'

'Of course I will, mate,' replied Lax. 'Let's each do our job better, and may God bless us both!'

They shook hands, and each went his way.

This vivid and suggestive conversation between Lax and the Communist may be regarded as the starting-point of the narrative contained in this book. It is an array of facts, a portrayal of things seen, a recital of guiding principles.

The worker in the field of religion and social reform needs to be animated and sustained by lofty but practicable ideals. Human material is difficult stuff. The depth or the shallowness, as the case may be, of the human heart is sometimes amazing. The proportion of God and devil is always hard to allocate. The investigator is continually being taken by surprise. But he can never get lost on the straight road of man's creation by God, man's redemption by Christ, and man's ultimate sanctification by the Holy Spirit. Every such worker is dealing direct with profound intuitions in the human breast. To awaken for the first time, or to reawaken after long sleep, such inward voices is his supreme task, his glorious quest.

Chapter I

THE BEGINNING

How far back does God begin in the working out of His purposes?

Sixty years ago that gifted, genial, and sunny soul, the Rev. Peter Mackenzie, conducted a mission in the town of Wigan. In that mission three young people, a young man and two young women, were converted. At the hands of that same evangelist they each received their first ticket of membership. Two of these young people, Samuel Lax and Jane Tatley, married. When their first child was born, the coming of the new life filled them with extraordinary elation. They were both great idealists, and both had dedicated their unborn child to God.

In the middle of a winter's night, the snow knee-deep and the wind howling drearily, a four-roomed cottage was lighted up, and outside a little room anxious hearts were waiting for that first faint cry. At last it came, and the watchers knew that the baby was born.

'Is it a boy or a girl?' asked the mother. She was told that it was a boy.

'Bring him to me,' she said.

She took the little one in her arms, implanted her

first mother's kiss, and, still hugging him, with her eyes uplifted and her face lit up with unearthly joy, she said :

> Let him live to preach Thy word,
> And let him to Thy glory live ;
> His every sacred moment spend
> In publishing the sinners' Friend.

She gave the child back to the nurse, and, having duly ordained him for sacred service, fell asleep, dreaming of what the future might mean.

The child's name was William Henry Lax, or, as he to this day is known in his native town, Willie Lax.

His mother hoped to live to see him grow to be a man, hoped to sit and hear him preach, and hoped to live to see him a valiant servant of Christ. In the inscrutable providence of Almighty God this was not to be. For three years she was stricken by a fatal disease. Her husband and friends saw her going into the dark valley. One day she sent for an old school-friend—the third of the young people referred to who were converted in Peter Mackenzie's mission. She said to Mary Lowe, ' I know I am dying, and I want you to promise me that when I am gone you will be a mother to my boy. I shall tell my husband that he is to come and see you. Don't say " No " to him when he asks you, for I want you to train the boy to become a preacher, and, if possible, a minister in our Church.' Soon the end drew near. Lax remembers being lifted

into his mother's arms for the last time—the long kiss, the murmured words of love and blessing, his mother's tears wet on his face. Then this devoted and saintly woman passed beyond the veil.

Two or three years afterwards, each feeling the sacredness of the charge made before her death, the boy's father and Mary Lowe were married at the same church, and took on the sacred obligation. That godly woman made it her business to use every effort to see to it that the prayers of the mother were answered. It was she who guided the boy's thoughts to his Saviour. It was she who led him into the Church. It was she who taught him theology, explained to him the Scriptures, and fired him with a passionate zeal for the conversion of the world.

These were the formative years of young Lax's life. The course of events in a Lancashire mining village would be necessarily commonplace, but in his home the boy saw life in its finest form. It was indeed plain living and high thinking. In those early days his father was an iron-moulder, earning small wages. Strict economy was the rule. Every penny meant much in that household There were two children, Willie and his sister Pollie.

To make ends meet, the thrifty mother had to resort to ingenious ways of making garments live a long life. Mending, darning, patching, took up much of her time. Like other youngsters, the boy intensely disliked wearing clothes patched beyond recognition!

'Mother,' he would say, 'mayn't I have a new pair of trousers? I'm tired of these'—looking down at the nether garments, darned at knees and in other places!

'My dear,' his mother would reply, 'never be ashamed of a nice patch; just you look at this one'; and, like the artist that she was, she began to expatiate on the beauty of the sewing and the delicacy of the herring-boning. 'Besides,' she would say, 'remember that mother did that for you!' Lax declares that after such admonitions he used to walk away lifting his knees like a high-stepping horse, exhibiting his patches!

Family prayer was the order of the day. The Bible was read evening after evening. Sunday was brightly but strictly observed. The conversation of the family centred principally in the Church and its work. The orbit of their lives ranged between the little sanctuary in Frederick Street and their four-roomed cottage.

The father came to be recognized as an unordained minister. He visited the sick and comforted the dying. Night after night he was called out of his bed to cheer some frightened soul nearing the valley of the shadow.

Lax's father is still remembered as an open-air preacher of extraordinary power. He would go into the poorest parts of the village and preach with irresistible attractiveness. He had the wonderful gift

of a tear in his voice. And rarely did he preach without tears raining down his hearers' faces. Lax's memories of this period are of standing by a borrowed chair holding his father's hat, while, from that improvised pulpit, Lax the elder preached Christ to his neighbours.

So those early years passed. Whatever may be said of the mid-Victorian period, it must be conceded that family life was a most vital thing, that domestic happiness was frequently enjoyed, and that the standard of conduct in the family circle was really high. Lax's early years were happy because they were full of activity, and the future always held the promise of a beautiful thing.

The story is told of Lax's father and mother visiting the theatre—the only visit they ever paid to such a place. They were essentially country people, with all the quaintness and narrowness of untravelled folk. His mother (so tender and affectionate was the relationship between them that he could never tolerate her being called 'step-mother') had been ill, and his father, gently stroking her whitening hair, said, 'My dear, we will go to some quiet little seaside place, where we can have the sands all to ourselves; it will bring back the colour to your cheeks.'

'Yes,' she replied, 'that will be lovely.'

So in a few weeks they set off for that quiet little seaside place called Blackpool, and in two or three hours found themselves in Talbot Road Station.

Faring forth from the station, the father carrying the

family carpet bag, they set out in search of lodgings. They were astonished at the crowds passing up and down the street. Never had they looked upon such a tide of human life.

All at once the husband was attracted by a poster on the wall indicating that *East Lynne* was being played at the Pavilion.

It should be explained that during the winter Mrs. Henry Wood's *East Lynne* had been read aloud by the family, the father taking the leading part. Many tears had been shed by the tender-hearted mother over the woes of 'poor Lady Isabel.' Dear, dear, what a world it was!

'Do you see that, mother?' he said.

'What is it?' she inquired.

'Why, they are playing *East Lynne* at the Pavilion.'

'But, dear, you wouldn't go to a theatre?' she protested.

'That isn't a theatre,' he answered; 'it's a Pavilion —P-a-v-i-l-i-o-n'—and he spelled out the word. This was proof positive.

'But how much will it be to go in?' she frugally inquired.

'Keep your eye on the bag, and I will go across the road to read the bill.' And off he ran.

Soon he returned with the satisfactory information that a seat could be got for threepence! So they would go to the Pavilion and see *East Lynne* on the stage.

The following night they stood in a queue waiting

for the doors of the Pavilion to open. By and by the mass of people slowly moved towards the pay-box.

'Two threepenny seats, please,' said the husband.

Two zinc checks were shot into his hand, and they proceeded to the allotted places.

'Move up! Move up!' called out an attendant.

'It was like going down the aisle of the chapel,' explained the simple woman, as she related her experience afterwards.

When they got to the bench upon which they were to sit, she reverently bowed her head, putting her hand before her eyes as she would in the little chapel.

'Mother,' said her husband in a loud whisper, 'you don't pray when you come to these places, you know.'

'What do you say, father?' she questioned, with a look of surprise.

'You don't pray when you come to these places!' he repeated.

'Oh! Why not?' she persisted.

'Well, you know——' And here he stopped, evidently at an end of his arguments.

In the meantime, amid the giggles of other admirers of *East Lynne*, she had assumed her perpendicular attitude, and was obviously troubled.

'Well, father,' she at last ejaculated, 'if I can't pray, I won't stay.'

Suiting the action to the word, she picked up her umbrella and turned towards the door. Her nonplussed husband followed.

'Well, father,' she began when they reached the door, 'for the first time in my life I'm ashamed of you! To think of it, that you would go to a place where you couldn't pray!'

'Let me explain,' he appealed.

'No, my dear,' she continued, 'it needs no explanation. I won't stay in a place where you tell me I'm not supposed to pray.'

And there the matter ended. It was the only occasion upon which they essayed to see the drama.

Lax often metaphorically takes off his hat to the memory of a mother whose principles and conduct were in such complete harmony.

Chapter II

EARLY DAYS

The forces that combine to develop character are many and varied. One can never tell what are the elements in our environment that produce the greatest results. The New Psychology would probably tabulate these with certainty and accuracy.

In Lax's case everything conspired towards an early decision for the service of God and the Church. One night, when he was about eleven years of age, his father was reading the twenty-seventh Psalm at family prayer. He reached the eighth verse, 'When Thou saidst, Seek ye My face; my heart said unto Thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek.'

Turning to the boy, the father said, 'Have you done that yet, my lad?'

'I want to do it, father,' replied the child.

'Let us pray!' said the father.

Whereupon father, mother, and son fell upon their knees. Fervent prayers were uplifted, wise and loving counsels given, and, when they rose to their feet, a decision that was to have enormous influence upon the boy's life had been taken. He never went back upon it. Indeed, that night a lamp of remembrance was lit that has never gone out.

One can only be sorry that in these days doubts are cast upon the fact of a child's conversion. Of course, a child's conversion is different in every way from that of an adult. But it certainly is a real conversion, and the child concerned knows what he is about. Lax was sure of his ground then, and years have confirmed his certitude.

About this period he began to earn his own living. It was in a printing-office, and his first week's wages were two shillings and sixpence.

There is something momentous about a boy's first earnings. The effect upon young Lax was to make him feel that he had suddenly become a man, that he was now in commerce, and that he must face his obligations in the maintenance of the home.

As soon as he received the coin he ran home as fast as his legs would carry him, tightly clutching the precious silver.

'Mother, mother!' he cried, as he rushed into the house, 'I've got it! Here it is!' And he put the first money he ever earned into his mother's hand. There were two proud people in Hindley that day.

Soon afterwards he was 'bound apprentice.' When the indenture was signed, and father and son were walking home, the father said, 'Now, my boy, I can do no more for you; you must paddle your own canoe.' From that moment Lax became a man, and set out on a journey which he could never have planned for himself. He found, like many another on such a

quest, that 'there's a divinity that shapes our ends.'

At this point in his history a strange and disconcerting thing happened. He developed a painful impediment in his speech, a stutter that involved facial contortions and practically destroyed his power of conversation with others. Nobody knows the shame and anguish suffered by sensitive natures in such circumstances. They become hypersensitive, introspective, and miserable. Foolish individuals may find pleasure in mocking and joking, but the sufferings of the victim are sometimes exquisitely painful.

In Lax's case the mother's agony was increased because it seemed likely to destroy for ever the prospects of his becoming a preacher. That was the thing for which she lived, and anything that appeared to prejudice that consummation must be of the devil! So she prayed about it. More than that, she encouraged him to overcome the impediment. Out in the fields he repeated poetry, harangued the beasts and birds, watching the consonants that seemed like mountains. The more he faced them, the higher they seemed to grow. The C's and G's and K's were the most formidable difficulties. Again and again he fell in his attempts to get over them.

This went on until he was about sixteen. His mother had begun to despair. Her hopes were to be blighted! One Friday night he went to a Holiness Meeting in a little room hired by the Salvation Army.

There the spirit of God fell upon the handful of people present. It was almost like Pentecost over again! Upon young Lax the power came with such dramatic suddenness and reality that he commenced to pray. He was conscious of being God-possessed. From that day the stutter ceased, the impediment was gone, and he was free!

Soon after this incident he preached his first sermon. It was in a Primitive Methodist chapel. A local preacher had disappointed the little congregation. The distressed steward came to young Lax and asked him to preach. His heart leaped within him. He had been making sermons for three years. He was waiting for the call, and lo! here was a definite call to preach. What should he do? A companion of a like mind offered to go with him and read the lesson. So they went. Lax preached his first sermon from the text, 'What shall I do, then, with Jesus?' At the close of the service he made an appeal for decision for Christ, and three responded to the appeal! From that day he never wanted a pulpit. Small congregations in country places invited the boy to deliver his message, and he rarely had a vacant Sunday. They were happy days. Like a prisoner set free—indeed, like one risen from the dead—he rejoiced in his new liberty. The years sped quickly, and destiny seemed big with possibilities.

For some nine months he laboured in the Beccles Circuit as lay agent, living in a village called Loddon.

It was ' far from the madding crowd,' five miles from the nearest railway Long walks were involved, but every day brought its compensation. Thirty years after leaving the circuit he revisited the village in which he lived for nine months. There he met the wife of the village blacksmith, who was society steward in the old days. She was then one hundred and six years old !

There he was a candidate for the ministry, and failed.

He went home to hard work for the year, and with the hope of being a candidate in his own circuit. The new superintendent, who did not know young Lax, had qualms as to nominating him, on the ground that his voice would not be strong enough for large chapels !

But there was another difficulty. His father had doubts—for he was only a working man—as to how the financial obligation should be met.

' How much will it cost ? ' asked his mother of the superintendent. ' I've been saving up for years to prepare for it if the Lord should call him.'

She went upstairs to her bedroom, and came down with a box. In that box over £100 had been saved in small silver, so that, if ever it were possible for the lad to go to college, there might be something to sustain him during that period.

So it came to pass that William H. Lax was accepted as a candidate for the ministry. When, at the end of four years' probation, he received ordination at the London Conference, the same good soul who had

trained the boy made the journey to London—the only time she ever made it. She sat in a distant corner in the gallery of Great Queen Street Chapel, and saw the ordaining hands of eminent ministers placed upon his head.

When the service was over she waited for him in the street. Flinging her arms around his neck, she implanted a kiss upon his lips. With tears streaming down her face, she said, 'Now, Lord, lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation!'

So her promise was kept, her task completed, her ambition achieved!

Chapter III

COLLEGE DAYS AND PROBATION

In September, 1892, Lax entered Didsbury College. At that time, as indeed from its earliest days until now, ' Didsbury ' stood for a great Methodist tradition. In the nineties the college was the home of fervent, aggressive evangelism. Among the various ' years ' then in residence there was a holy rivalry in evangelistic efficiency. Missions were held, open-air services conducted, and, with all the fervour of youth, preaching was taken to be a serious business. Sundays were spent in preaching in surrounding towns and villages. With modest joy men told on the Monday of the triumphs of the gospel the day before.

The teaching staff encouraged the students in their schemes of evangelism. On three occasions Lax was permitted to continue revival services begun in the vacation for a week or two after term had commenced. The class-meetings and prayer-meetings were occasions of real spiritual power.

With great reverence, Lax still speaks of the Rev Richard Green, Dr. Marshall Randles, the Rev. W. F. Slater, Dr. Waddy Moss, and Dr. Ritson, who was then assistant tutor. Each in his own way did much to develop the preaching spirit and tradition at Didsbury.

Along what avenues the greatest good comes to the student in our theological colleges would be difficult to say. The men are of such varied types and of such differing gifts that each would find the benefit of a college experience according to the approach of his own personality.

In Lax's case the advantages were manifold. He knew he could never hope to excel in the purely academic field. His early education did not go beyond that of a Wesleyan day school, with such advantages as could be acquired from evening classes in a Mechanics' Institute.

The greatest good, therefore, to such as he, lies in the spiritual and moral contact with men of similar tastes and aspirations. There is a widening of view and a deepening of character.

Going to Didsbury was probably the second great epoch in his life. From the age of eleven years he had been incessantly at work. Long hours and close application to his daily task, with constant preaching appointments on the Sundays, involved undue strain on physical and mental powers. For three years he lived the sheltered life of the pupil, learning from tutors and students alike. They were precious days, and frequently in the rush of life in London he has looked back to those blessed years with unspeakable delight.

Sundays were days of unbounded happiness, for then he could turn to his beloved task of preaching.

Stories, some apocryphal, still go the round of his old college friends. Two may be related here.

It was his turn to preach in the college chapel on the Thursday evening. As usual, tutors and students were present. Lax announced his text: 'I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.' In his youthful days he had something of the histrionic gift, which occasionally carried him too far. In a moving peroration he led St. Paul to the scaffold, and, as the noble warrior's head fell into the basket, the young preacher exclaimed:

> O may I triumph so
> When all my warfare's past!

His friends wish him—many years hence—a pleasanter end!

The other story takes us to a rough mining village in East Lancashire. It was the occasion of the Sunday-school anniversary All the world knows how seriously Lancashire takes her anniversaries. They are the great event of the year. Generally a stranger is invited to preach. Should he be a distinguished minister the thrill of pride is all the more profound.

Application had been made to the college Principal for a student to preach the anniversary sermons in this village, and Lax was appointed.

When he arrived on the Saturday evening, the Sunday-school superintendent eyed him critically, and doubted whether the student was tall enough for their pulpit, but he would wait and see. On the Sunday

morning Lax went into the pulpit, and lo! not much more than his head could be seen! That pulpit was built for sons of Anak.

What could they do? Why, in time for the evening service, they would erect a platform in the pulpit, and so lift the preacher that he could be well seen by the congregation. But they had no timber with which to build the platform. It was Sunday, and it was hopeless to expect help from the local timber-yard, for it was closed. So the idea must be abandoned. One ingenious brother, however, had an inspiration, and duly arrived with a great burden on his back. When the preacher ascended the pulpit steps for the evening service he found the platform put up, strong and firm, and so high that he could survey his congregation effectively and in comfort.

That service has become one of the historic memories of the place. When friends forgather on special occasions, and old memories are revived, 'Ah,' says one man, 'it was a wunderful sarvice, and Lax preached a grand sarmon from "How wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?"—on our petty door!'

The end of the third year came. On the eve of leaving the old haunts he was taking a final walk round the college grounds. He was sad, and yet glad. Books were packed, and the bits of furniture stowed away, waiting to be sold to the new-comers in September. Everything spoke of the pilgrimage soon to begin. He met Dr. Waddy Moss.

'Well, Mr. Lax,' said the tutor, 'what are you going to do?'

'I don't know, sir,' he replied, 'but I'm hoping that Conference will appoint me to a wide country circuit, where my few sermons will last a long time.'

'Don't worry about that,' replied the doctor—and Lax never forgot his comfortable words—'whenever sermons are wanted they always come.' And so it has proved.

Within a month from the time of this conversation he received a letter from the President of the Conference informing him that he was to go to the Leeds Central Mission, on the List of Reserve

It was as different a sphere from what he had desired as could ever come to a man. Instead of decentralization it was concentration of the closest kind.

Wesley Chapel at that time was in great prosperity. It was the scene of Samuel Chadwick's earliest success. God has blessed his ministry in a wonderful degree, but it is doubtful if any work he has done in his long and honourable career is more remarkable than that accomplished in his three years at Wesley. The chapel was crowded every Sunday night. It was full even in the afternoon for the Adult Bible Class.

Week evenings were just as eventful, for class-meetings, band-meetings, and prayer-meetings were occasions of holy joy.

To this hive of spiritual activity Lax was introduced on the first Sunday in September, 1895. He had never

seen anything like it before. The impressions made upon his sensitive imagination were deep and profound. They abide to this day.

Robert Browell was his superintendent. He was a mighty evangelist, and rarely did a Sunday pass without conversions. He was a master of the art of conducting a prayer-meeting. His personality seemed to ally itself with the Spirit of God. At times he was simply irresistible in appeal.

At the end of the year, Lax was appointed District Missionary in the Halifax and Bradford District. With headquarters at Bradford, he fared forth to the towns and villages of Yorkshire, on his errands of revivalism. Bradford, Keighley, Huddersfield, Mytholmroyd, Hebden Bridge, were among the places visited. In some of the towns, God visited the Churches with remarkable power.

In the month of April came one of the dramatic events of his life. A great demonstration was organized in Bradford. The chief speaker was to be Hugh Price Hughes, then at the zenith of his fame and prestige in West London. The evening came, St. George's Hall was crowded, and hundreds turned away. Price Hughes was on the top of his form, and electrified the crowd by his perfervid eloquence and wit. The multitude was in the hollow of his hand! Laughter and tears were in his gift.

While all this was going on, Lax was in despair, for he had to speak after Price Hughes! Who could do

it? Who would be tolerated by the audience after this brilliant exhibition? Should he send up a note to the chairman, asking him to announce the doxology and benediction, and so let the people go? Nobody could follow such a speech! In his terror he even thought of running home! To his dismay Price Hughes sat down suddenly, and in two minutes he was called upon to speak! He did his best, said his civil nothing (as he puts it) and sat down.

No sooner had he taken his seat than Price Hughes tilted back his chair, and, turning to Lax, who sat behind, took his hand, and whispered, 'Thank you, for that! Will you come to be my colleague in West London?'

If the platform had opened and swallowed him up, Lax could not have been more surprised. To be the colleague of Hugh Price Hughes, in those days, was the equivalent of having the Archangel Gabriel for his superintendent!

'I'm afraid I cannot, sir,' replied Lax. 'I've already accepted an invitation to stay here another year.'

'Oh, never mind that. I will speak to Mr. Clayton, your chairman. If he is agreeable, will you come?'

'I shall be greatly honoured, sir, if you invite me, and will do my best.'

The meeting was over, but as Lax walked to his lodgings in West Bowling he felt that the moment was big with destiny.

Chapter IV

WITH HUGH PRICE HUGHES IN WEST LONDON

A month after the conversation recorded in the last chapter, that is, in May, 1897, Lax received the following characteristic letter from the Rev. Hugh Price Hughes:

'Dear Mr. Lax,—As you may probably be aware, I have received a very kind letter from Mr. Clayton, in which he says that in his judgement you are a suitable appointment for our work in Soho, and that he and the Home Mission Committee of the District are, therefore, willing to give you up. I greatly appreciate this brotherly attitude of your Committee, and on the strength of what I have heard about you . . I am very glad to invite you to this circuit next Conference to take charge of the Soho work hitherto in the hands of Mr. Tindall. Your appointment will, of course, be an *experiment*, and its continuance must entirely depend upon the extent to which, by the blessing of God, you succeed. London is a totally different place from Leeds or Bradford, and you will come to the most difficult sphere of work in England. That is only an additional reason why

you should come. From what I know of your work, I believe you will succeed—and if you do succeed, it will be indeed success of the highest and best kind. I should not have invited you unless and until I thought you were the man for the work. The nature and extent of the sphere will depend largely upon yourself. If there is any question you would like to ask me I will gladly answer it ; and I send you a copy of our new report. If you should be coming to London I should be very glad to see you, and you could stop at our house. Praying that the rich blessing of God may rest on the contemplated arrangement,

'I am,

'Yours very sincerely,

'H. Price Hughes.'

The invitation so cordially given was duly accepted. This was done with much trepidation. It was so unexpected ; it ran athwart the avenue of service Lax had imagined for himself. Besides, he had never been in London Only five years before, he was a village lad who had never once slept outside his cottage home ! The whole thing was incomprehensible. Still, if one believed in providential guidance at all, here was an indisputable example of it. So there was nothing for it but to go on.

Accordingly, in the following September he journeyed to the Metropolis, and was met at St. Pancras Station

by the Rev. C. Ensor Walters, to whom he would henceforth be colleague, and with whom, as it turned out, a lasting friendship was formed.

Mr. Walters took him to his lodgings in Torrington Square, gave him general directions as to how to find St. James's Hall, Piccadilly, where he had to preach the following day, and then, with good wishes for success, left him.

Eager to see London, he sallied forth through Russell Square, Tottenham Court Road, Oxford Street, Regent Street, to Piccadilly Circus. Here, for the first time, he gazed upon the statue of Eros. There was the world-famous St. James's Hall. The Saturday night concert was on. It was crowded. In the Lower Hall the Moore and Burgess Minstrels were entertaining their patrons. Crowds everywhere. The atmosphere of gaiety and revelry pervaded everything. It was Vanity Fair over again. His first impulse was to run away. He couldn't face the job. He was too inadequate for such a sphere. A great blunder had been made, and he had better admit it at once!

In this frame of mind he began to retrace his steps towards Torrington Square, and to bed, for he was weary beyond words. Slowly he walked, arguing with himself, pitying himself, despising himself.

In Tottenham Court Road he espied a hot-potato barrow. On a spike was displayed a giant potato. It looked so tempting. He would taste the potatoes! So he speculated a few coppers in the steaming-hot

dainties, and, in the gathering dusk, ate them furtively as he walked. He has never forgotten those potatoes. They were his undoing, for in the night he was taken with the worst bilious attack of his experience. Not a moment's sleep could he get. He denounced himself for his folly, and wished all steaming-hot potatoes at the bottom of the sea.

The following morning the Sabbath dawned with its accustomed quiet in West Central London, but the new minister rose from his bed heavy-eyed, weary, and depressed. He faced his morning congregation of fifteen hundred, and the evening crowd of three thousand. Somehow, as all such days have a way of doing, that Sunday passed! And so did the biliousness!

A few days afterwards Lax received another letter from Price Hughes, written from Davos Platz, his favourite holiday resort.

> 'My wife and I,' wrote the great Methodist leader, 'have thought, talked together, and prayed a good deal about you, especially last Sunday morning and evening, when you were holding your first services. We have been more delighted than I can express, and devoutly thankful to God, to learn from several correspondents that you had a "good time" last Sunday, and that you had conversions at night. I did what I could in our conversation at Leeds to prevent you from underestimating the difficulties of

the task that awaited you, or your being discouraged at the outset by circumstances so very different from any you have experienced in Yorkshire, but I am quite confident that "the soul-converting power" will be as effective in Soho as in Wesley, Leeds. God has enabled you to make, at once, a favourable impression on the people, and new hope has sprung up in their hearts. We have a really Christian and very earnest nucleus to start with, and a field of boundless possibility. I pray with all my heart that God may bless you more and more. You may count upon my co-operation in every way in my power. You will discover that the poor people have been much discouraged. . . . But that feeling of discouragement will soon pass away, if conversions are multiplied. The more you can steal hearers and workers from my congregation at St. James's Hall the better I shall be pleased.'

Lax was Hughes' colleague for five wonderful years. They were the great creative years of his life. Hughes had an extraordinary personality, and his presence had the tonic effect of mountain air. He was then in the greatness of his powers, and seemed blessed with the strength of ten men. He had an incalculable influence on his young colleague. Hughes was the magnet and Lax the bit of steel. Amazement, in the younger man, turned to admiration, and admiration to love.

One need hardly dwell on the fact that Hughes developed in a most remarkable way the abilities of those around him. In those days he had four young colleagues, and all four have concentrated on some definite work. They were Ensor Walters, Henry S. Lunn, Arthur Sherwell, and William H. Lax.

It was Hughes' custom to invite his young colleagues home to supper with him on Sunday nights. When the meal was over the scintillating conversation would cease, and, lying on the couch, Hughes would say, 'Now, Lax, tell me about that book I gave you to read.' When Lax had given him a summary of the book, he would say, 'Now, Walters, what about the book you've been reading?' In this way Hughes got the heart out of books he had no time to read himself, although he was a voracious reader.

It was on one of these memorable days that Hughes sent to Lax, in connexion with a certain Easter gathering he could not himself attend, this inspiring note:

'I am very glad to send you, through my colleague, Mr. Lax, a word of congratulation and good cheer. The empty sepulchre of Easter morning means that no evil is necessary; that divine sympathy must conquer, and that we cannot labour in vain, in living union with Christ. I beg you, therefore, to be very audacious and enthusiastic. Never count or fear the enemies of righteousness. Despise all difficulties. Laugh at impossibilities, and cry, It shall be done.

> Your business is to destroy Mammonism and Militarism in the twentieth century, and to hasten the Millennium. Wake up and hurry up!
>
> 'HUGH PRICE HUGHES.'

Yes, those were great days in the London Mission. There were giants in the land—Hughes himself, with his flaming tongue and pen, wielding a unique influence in the capital of the empire; Mark Guy Pearse, at the zenith of his wonderful powers; William D. Walters, the mighty preacher and saintly soul; Peter Thompson, the greatheart of the East End; Henry T. Meakin, the man of sanctified vision and passion for the conversion of London; John E. Wakerley, filling St. John's Square; Joseph H. Hopkins, the eloquent evangelist; John Howard, the friend of the down-and-outs of London. These were names with which to conjure.

Besides these, there were some of the most notable laymen in Methodism bearing official burdens and doing splendid service for Christ and His Church in association with the West London Mission. Sir Percy W. Bunting, editor of *The Contemporary Review*, and Sir John Bamford Slack, M.P. for Mid Herts., were circuit stewards. With these, filling various offices and earning deep respect, were Mr. Thomas Owen, M.P. for Launceston, Mr. Henry Marden, Mr. John H. Lile, Mr. Josiah Nix, Mr. Henry Wilson, and many others.

When Lax went to the West London Mission he was

the junior minister on the staff. To-day he is the senior London missioner. Thirty years have rolled by since he landed in London.

Of all the events of those crowded years in West London, not one has had such far-reaching effect on his life and work as that which took place on Wednesday, August 2, 1899, when, with Hugh Price Hughes and Charles Ensor Walters as officiating ministers, Lax married Minnie, the eldest daughter of his first Superintendent, Robert Browell. If marriages are made in heaven, then surely this one had its inception in that higher region. None could have foreseen the extraordinary influence that Mrs. Lax would wield in her husband's ministry.

The wedding took place at Old Ford, now the third place in the Poplar and Bow Mission. At that period the bride's father was the resident minister there.

An old man who had been converted at Craven Hall, and who earned a living by driving a cab, expressed a wish to drive Lax and his bride to Euston Station *en route* to the Lake District, where the honeymoon was to be spent.

Certainly, he should do it. It was a hot day. The sultry air made the slightest movement an exhausting effort, as the poor old horse found, and his pace was consequently slow. Crawling along the Euston Road, Lax put his head out of the cab window and urged the driver on: they were going to miss the train; only three minutes were left!

The poor animal was importuned to put on his best speed, and as the vehicle passed under the station arch the hands of the clock pointed exactly to four! They would miss the train! The occupants of that cab perspired with anxiety. Into the courtyard they sped, leaped out of the cab, two porters took their hand-baggage, each urging the palpitating passengers on! They reached the platform: the train was on the move: the bride was flung into one carriage—the bridegroom into another! And so they started on their honeymoon.

Chapter V

DOWN POPLAR WAY

In the year 1899 London Methodism was greatly exercised concerning the inner-belt churches. The migration of the people outwards had left many of them high and dry. Though the population was greater than ever the congregations were dwindling.

The position was very serious. One day Hugh Price Hughes sent for Lax and explained the position, winding up by asking if he were prepared to go to Poplar.

'I shall never forget that interview,' says Lax. 'He told me that young ministers should be like young military officers, ready to undertake the leadership of any forlorn hope in wartime, or be drafted to any lonely, unhealthy outpost of the Empire in peace-time, live, and, if needs be, die there. This call to implicit obedience, in the military spirit, thrilled me, and I left Hughes, resolved to fulfil his desire that I should not only go to Poplar, but stay there.'

'Poplar'—the word does not sound very attractive, does it?

Some time ago a company of elderly men fell to talking about the future, discussing the question as to where they would like to end their days. One man suggested Bournemouth, another Scarborough, another

Harrogate, another Leamington, and so on. Not one said he would like to end his days in Poplar!

As would be expected, it is, in the main, a borough of exceedingly mean streets, a desert, unrelieved by any middle-class oasis. The great bulk of the house property is assessed at no more than £20 a year, a figure which can be taken as an index of the prosperity-level.

Geographically, it is situated on the Thames between Blackwall Reach and Limehouse Reach, and contains some of the great docks. It is unique among Metropolitan boroughs in that it has seven miles of river-frontage. It thus provides the gateway to the heart of London, as well as the starting-place of passengers and commerce to the ends of the earth. In spite of that suggestion of romance, it is generally regarded, and with truth, as one of the least attractive parts of London.

It would be wrong to say that there are no features of interest in Poplar. The wide main thoroughfares are imposing. The parish church is beautiful. The Queen Victoria Seamen's Rest is a beacon and a blessing to men of the mercantile marine. The great docks strike the imagination.

The sanitary labours of the municipal authorities are most praiseworthy, but beyond and behind the main streets are dreariness and drabness of the heart-breaking kind. Few choose to live in Poplar; and with good reason. What are the facts? The rise of industrialism, nearly a hundred years ago, started the building of thousands

of houses in East London in haphazard fashion. These stand to-day, a menace to health and the cause of discontent. There are very many houses in Poplar to which the sun gets little, if any, direct access. They are dark and dingy. Many a gentleman's stables are better. Here children are born, here mothers bring up their families, and thousands are condemned to get their ideas of physical and moral blessedness amidst these conditions. Think of thousands of families living one family one room! Think of an eight-roomed house with eight adults and thirty-two children—forty in all—living there at one time! Think of the herding together of the sexes among the adolescent boys and girls! Think of the shocking lack of that privacy which decency demands! Think of ten people living and sleeping in one room! Think of the wear and tear on the nervous system of men, women, and children, suffering from lack of light and beauty!

But then there are other considerations. Poplar is a place where poor folk, for the most part, predominate. London is mapped out, like a great chessboard, into boroughs, the rich and the comfortable segregated strictly from the struggling poor. In many unfavourably situated boroughs you will find a fair admixture of the middle class. But not so in Poplar. It is almost exclusively inhabited by the poor, by those who suffer the meaner miseries of London life. Poverty cannot always be measured by income alone. Poverty is that state where a man is chronically anxious about

his future and the future of his family This is an anxiety that invariably tends towards bitterness and despair. Lax himself has known the pangs of poverty, and, looking on at his neighbours struggling to get out of the glue-pot of adverse circumstances, is conscious of the tragedy of it all, for he knows that they have wings. God made them for something finer and better.

Probably half of the men are casual labourers, for the most part in the great docks and allied industries. As to employment, the position may change from day to day; there may be fairly good periods, and very bad ones.

There are three classes of labourers at the docks—the 'permanent' men, engaged by the week; the 'preference' men, taken on, as work demands, by the half-day; and the 'casuals,' who hardly ever get a job at all. But 'hope springs eternal in the human breast.' Perhaps a 'permanent' man may fall out through accident, or he may take pneumonia! So the shivering crowd waits at the dock gates twice a day—at early morning and at midday.

And so, without further labouring the point, it is clear that 'Poplarism' is the outcome of Poplar. The foolish nonsense indulged in by the extremists—who, by the way, are in the minority—should not blind us to the conditions of poverty in Poplar, and to a situation which is a danger to our present civilization.

Lax had many a vivid illustration of the pitiful

Poplar Wesleyan Church.

conditions of poverty in the ordinary rounds of his pastoral visitation. Looking over his notes, he finds the following marked down as being seen in the course of an afternoon :

In one tenement of two rooms the children had no change of clothes. The mother explained that they stayed in the room naked while the clothes were being washed.

A family of eight living in two rooms had only one bed, such as it was, for the whole family, and that without clothes, except an apology for a quilt.

A father, mother, and four children occupied one room ; father out of work, and one child should be in the hospital.

Another case reads : Two adults and five children in two rooms. One set of clothing and bedding only, the latter being washed at the time of the visit. Mother in bad health ; shortly to undergo an operation.

. . . . . .

Here is a story which illustrates the dreadful reactions of the sordid conditions under which so many of the people live.

Late one night a woman came to the Manse to see Lax. She was in great distress of mind. Again and again she broke out into hysterical weeping. After a time she composed herself, and said :

' I have come for your help, sir ; my little girl of

fourteen——!' Again she broke down. After a fit of sobbing she told her dreadful story.

'My little girl of fourteen is in trouble. The awful thing is that my husband—her father—is the cause of it all.'

As may be imagined, a feeling of horror swept over Lax. He understood.

'How terrible!' said he.

'Yes,' continued the woman, 'it is terrible; I don't know what to do.'

It transpired that there were seven children. These nine people lived in two rooms. The father was a man addicted to drink, a brutal kind of fellow; but one who, in a rough way, loved his wife and children. While he was in drink this foul deed had been done.

Lax asked the woman to tell her husband to come and see him. He did so. The poor fellow, victim of circumstances, victim of heredity, the victim of almost everything that was evil, sat in the study twisting his cap in his hands and in real terror as to what might happen.

'Are you goin' to give me away, sir? Are you going to send me to jail?' he asked tremblingly.

'No,' replied the minister, 'I'm not going to give you away, nor am I going to be a party to sending you to prison. But I want to know,' he went on, 'whether you are truly and deeply sorry for the dreadful thing you have done. Do you realize what an awful sin you

have committed, and the wrong you have brought on a young, innocent life?'

The poor wretch was speechless. But it was clear that, in his dull and stupid fashion, he was sorry. He knew, moreover, that if the police got to hear of this he would probably get ten years' imprisonment. Lax was in a quandary. Should he be guilty of compounding a felony? Was it worth the risk? If the crime were exposed, what about the wife and seven children? Was there not a better way out of the difficulty?

In a few weeks, when he was quite satisfied of the man's sorrow and repentance, Lax suggested that he should emigrate, and that when he had earned money he should send some for the maintenance of his family. He eagerly agreed to this. In a short time he sailed for Australia. He quickly found work, and honoured in the spirit and in the letter the promise he had made.

In the meantime, Lax had a wonderful exhibition of the ingenuity and devotion of a good mother. She said she would like to take her daughter into the country to live with a sister, where the baby could be born. This was done. The mother then came to see the minister, and, to his surprise, made an extraordinary suggestion. She herself would act in such a way as to lead people to believe she expected an addition to her family! With almost unearthly eagerness she unveiled her scheme; not a soul but they two were to know of the camouflage. So she played the part, and, with all the artistry of the perfect actress, made the thing appear real!

It was an astounding instance of mother-love working for the honour of a child. After a time she also went into the country. The baby was born. On her return all her neighbours were in raptures over the beauty of Mrs. C——'s eighth baby!

This story has a happy ending—an ending that justified the means adopted in this particular case. Two years after the father had sailed for the other side of the world, Lax arranged for the family to follow. There they are to-day, living in happiness and prosperity in a new environment. It is to be hoped that a new vision of what God is, and what His Church means, has made all the difference to that home.

Enough! The foregoing is recorded simply because it may give some idea of the conditions under which the Poplar Wesleyan Mission has been working for a quarter of a century.

It is but a familiar platitude to say that, no matter how adequately the physical need may be met, the ultimate problem in any attempt towards the betterment of such an area is that of making better men and women. When the politicians have propounded their schemes and fought for their programmes, it is the work of the Christian preacher, with his gospel of peace and goodwill, that counts.

So, having in our minds some sort of picture of Poplar and its need, we return to the special share which Lax has had in trying, as wisely as may be, to help forward the highest interests of its citizens.

Chapter VI

SOME POPLAR TYPES

In Poplar, as in all the poorer parts of London, the mission worker is up against tragedy continually, but there is a great amount of comic relief. The minister in such an area must have a sense of humour or he could never keep going at all. He must be emotionally resilient, reacting to the environment of the hour, or he would literally go crazy. The human heart could never stand the strain of carrying inviolable secrets, standing by a man meeting inevitable disaster, sharing the misery of men and women sinking in the vortex of adversity, if it could not forget the tragedy and fling off the burden at the sight of some incongruous episode or the recital of some amusing yarn. What a boon is the gift of humour! What a blessed relief is a genuinely hearty laugh!

Jesus was 'a man of sorrows'—yes, but, as Dr. George Jackson says, to represent the gracious guest who was welcome at the festive board, who attracted children, as one who was grim and melancholy, is a vile caricature, a false picture which has done incalculable harm, particularly in regard to young folk's ideas of religion.

In Poplar there is brilliant light as well as deep

shadows. The children, by very instinct, are full of energy and pluck, and are as buoyant as an india-rubber ball. Older folk learn very largely to live a day at a time, and pick up gleams of passing sunshine with a sincere word of thanksgiving. So the humble worker in a poor neighbourhood may claim to be in succession to John Ruskin himself, of whom his biographer said, when he was in the full torrent of his artistic and social campaign: 'He was at once a prophet prophesying against the evil of the world, and a magician revealing its beauty.'

The christening of babies has had a prominent place in Lax's work in Poplar. For the most part the orthodox names are given and the routine procedure is followed, but now and again something startling is experienced.

. . . . . .

One day a man and his wife appeared with their baby. They wished it to be baptized. The ceremony commenced.

'What is the child's name?' asked Lax.

'Genius,' said the father.

'Genius?' queried the incredulous minister, slowly spelling the word. 'Do you mean brilliant, clever?'

'Yus, sir,' was the reply.

The child was already in the minister's arms. He gazed upon the infant which was to bear that

astounding name. Moreover, the congregation were silent witnesses of the *sotto voce* conversation.

'But does it occur to you that this child may be the biggest fool ever born?' suggested the minister in a whisper.

'Never mind that, sir,' replied the father. 'I want to give him something to live up to. Carry on! Call him Genius!'

The child was duly baptized according to his father's wish, and the record stands to this day in the Poplar Mission baptismal register.

. . . . . .

Another christening story: this time about a baby girl.

'The child's name?' asked Lax, as he held the infant in his arms.

'Olive Branch,' replied the father.

'I beg your pardon,' said the minister. 'Did you say Olive Branch?'

'He's made a bloomer, sir,' explained the mother 'He means Olive Blanche!'

She knew. And the minister felt greatly relieved.

. . . . . .

One dreary November afternoon, Lax called to have tea with a dear old friend, Mrs. Brown. She lived in one of the poorest streets, and occupied one room. Within five feet of the window was a blank wall, and

the sun never shone into that room—it was grey and desolate. No wonder that it reacted on the poor woman's spirits. Like Mr. Fearful, she generally saw hobgoblins and imagined that everything was going to the dogs.

On this particular day she was more depressed than usual, and her face showed unmistakable signs of tears. When the minister walked in she picked up her apron and with the corner wiped her eyes.

'Well, Mrs. Brown, and how are you to-day?'

'Aw, Muster Lax, I'm very, very poorly.'

'I'm sorry to hear that,' said the minister. 'What's the matter?'

'Eh, I don't know,' she replied. 'I don't know. I got up at six o'clock this mornin', and I've been cryin' ever since—*and I'm going to start again after I've had a cup of tea.*'

. . . . . .

Another day, Lax paid a pastoral call on one of his good folk, Mrs. Bloomer. Now Mrs. Bloomer was one of the Micawber tribe—always waiting for something to turn up. She was ever ready for a gossip, never carried trouble one minute longer than was necessary, and generally looked on the world with a cheerful smile.

But Mrs. Bloomer's best friend couldn't truthfully say that she was a good housekeeper, or possessed a tidy mind. Her three rooms were always in a muddle,

and to get to a chair the visitor had to climb over one obstacle after another.

'Here, sir, sit on this,' she gaily said, as she brushed an up-turned box with her apron, and with the back of her hand wiped the perspiration from her face. 'Now, then, yer look nice and comfortable there, and I'm *so* glad to see yer. The place is not as tidy as I should like it, but, then, sir, as I allus says, "*It's better to be alive in a dirty 'ouse than dead in a clean 'un.*"'

. . . . . .

The coster was loudly calling 'Fish alive-o! Fish alive-o!'

'Are they fresh?' asked one of Lax's poor women, looking at three venerable specimens lying on a board.

'Fresh, missus, fresh? What d'you think? Just look at 'em!'

Shaking his fist in the direction of the three sad-looking herrings, he shouted:

'Lie down, ye devils, lie down!'

. . . . . .

One of Lax's old friends in Poplar was a man of eighty-nine years of age. He was a Scotsman, with all the virility and vigour of our northern cousins. Physically he was well-proportioned, his skin as dark as mahogany, and he rejoiced in a shock of iron-grey hair and a long, unruly beard. His voice was loud and his accent spiced with a delicious North-countree burr-r-r.

He was extraordinary in many ways, impatient of innovations of every sort and kind. Modern youth was anathema to him. Girls he called ' sticks of asparagus,' and young men, what were they? Why, they were ' vegetable marrows ' !

Even at his advanced age he enjoyed vigorous health, and Lax often envied his capacity to outlive ordinary human frailties

About once a month the minister called to see the old man. Of course, there was the cup of tea and a long chat. He looked forward to these visits with the greatest pleasure, and the warmth of his hospitality was unbounded. His room, it must be confessed, was not orderly. Indeed, it was a veritable hovel. He was a widower living alone in one room. A bed was in the corner, and this he used for all sorts of purposes. The ashes in the fire-grate were emptied about once a week, and the dust had accumulated to such a degree that everything was smothered in grime. But there he was, happy, vigorous, critical.

' I wish you would tell me the secret of your abounding health,' said Lax to him one day. ' How have you managed to keep so active? You surely have some principles by which you live? '

Taking his pipe out of his mouth, the old man fixed the minister with his critical eye.

' Principles ! ' he shouted, ' I hae none ! Oh, yes, I have,' he went on, and he looked thoughtful for a minute. ' One principle is : Take no notice o' doctors :

I don't believe in 'em. As a matter of fact, you are sure to be right if you do the opposite of what they order you.

'For instance,' he continued, 'they say you should ha' plenty o' fresh air. Fresh air!' He gave a sniff of contempt. 'Fresh air?' he questioned. 'What do I want wi' fresh air? I never get any, and I don't want any!

'They say you ought to hae exercise—walk five miles a day. Five miles a day, indeed! I never walk if I can ride—no, I never walk if I can be carried!

'They say, too, that you should hae baths—baths wi' water, if you please!' he repeated, with concentrated scorn.

'Baths! Bah! To my certain knowledge I've not had a bath for seventy-two years,' and extending his hands, he cried, '*and what's the matter wi' me?*'

. . . . . .

Lax was riding home one night in a London bus. It was late, and he was very tired. Probably he looked weary, and weariness suggested despair.

With arms folded, head bowed, and eyes closed, he attracted the attention of a fellow-passenger, possibly a reveller going home in merry mood.

The bus stopped, and the reveller lurched towards the door.

As he passed the minister he smacked him on the

shoulder, ' Cheer up, old cock ! ' he said gaily. ' Things are not half as bad as they look ! '

. . . . . .

On another occasion the minister was riding in a tramcar with a well-known preacher, who, to say the least, was not very prepossessing in appearance. He always appeared gloomy, and his face looked as though it could not relax into a smile. He seemed to have no hope.

Two men entered the tram. Clearly they were under the influence of drink, and had reached the genial, confidential stage.

Sitting opposite the two ministers, the new-comers regarded them critically. Soon one noted the sad, despairing face, and his blinking eyes gazed curiously upon it.

' Poor devil ! ' said he, leaning forward, overflowing with sympathy.

. . . . . .

The poor woman was really ill. Lax expressed his sympathy.

' What does the doctor say ? ' inquired the minister.

' He says I'm armenic,' was the reply.

' Armenic ! ' ejaculated the astonished minister. ' That must be something very bad.'

' Yes,' she moaned. ' He says I ain't got no blood in me harteries.'

. . . . . .

An old fish-hawker made a precarious living by going from door to door selling fish. With a basket on his arm he trudged mile after mile every day seeking customers. Lax heard that he was ill.

The minister entered the little room and found him in bed. The place was foul beyond description.

Lax tried to comfort him, and took him grapes that would moisten his lips. Prayer was suggested, and the poor fellow was tenderly commended to God.

As the minister rose from his knees the sick man raised himself on his arm and, looking towards the floor, said, 'Mister Lax, do ye want any fish?'

'Fish?' Lax ejaculated. 'But you are not selling fish now.'

'Oh, yes, I am,' he replied. With a great effort he leaned over the side of the bed and began to search for something.

'I keeps 'em under the bed,' he explained; 'it keeps 'em warm—here they are!'

Lax bought some depressed-looking herrings, and certain cats rejoiced that night over a good supper.

. . . . . .

Lax had been ill. There were deep lines on his brow and his face was haggard and drawn.

'I'm sorry to see you so poorly, sir,' said one of his people. 'Do you know, sir,' he went on, 'I had a friend who looked just as you look now, an' he was dead in twenty-four hours!'

. . . . . .

On the same day a sympathetic woman saw her sick minister.

Lax had been paying some pastoral calls, and felt, and looked, tired. So he thought he would turn homewards.

'How are you to-day, sir?' the woman tenderly inquired.

'I'm not feeling at all well,' replied Lax, 'so I'm going home.'

'*Yes, sir,*' she assented, '*I'm afraid you are!*'

. . . . . .

Lax was conducting the marriage ceremony for a costermonger and his bride. The man was a big, robust fellow, and his bride a smart little girl. Her behaviour during the ceremony indicated that she had a will of her own. To everybody's surprise, she refused to promise to obey. Somewhat disconcerted by this refusal, the minister said, 'Please repeat after me, "Love, honour, and obey."'

'Love, honour, and m—m—m,' she murmured.

Lax waited a moment, a smile lurking round his lips.

'Perhaps you'll repeat it after me this time?' he suggested.

All she said was, 'Love, honour, and m—m.'

Things looked like being at a standstill. What should be done?

The bridegroom came to the rescue. Looking down

on the obstinate and diminutive bride and then turning to Lax, he said:

'Never mind, sir, get on with it. I'll put 'er right when I get 'er 'ome.'

. . . . . .

Just one more:

The man was hard up, and looked very miserable. Could he see Mr. Lax?

'Certainly,' said Mrs. Lax.

He was shown into the study.

'Good evening,' said the minister.

'Good evenin',' answered the visitor. 'I wonder if you can help me? I'm done—all for the want of £5 15s.—and I want to ask you to lend me that much money.'

'Well,' replied Lax, 'I don't know you; besides, what security can you offer for the loan, if I make it? What assets have you?'

'Assets?' queried the fellow. 'What's assets?'

'Why,' explained the minister, 'goods and chattels.'

'Goods and chattels!' slowly drawled the man thoughtfully, 'goods and chattels?' His face lit up. 'Yes, I have,' he said, 'I've a wife and nine kids!'

Some people would have thought these a liability!

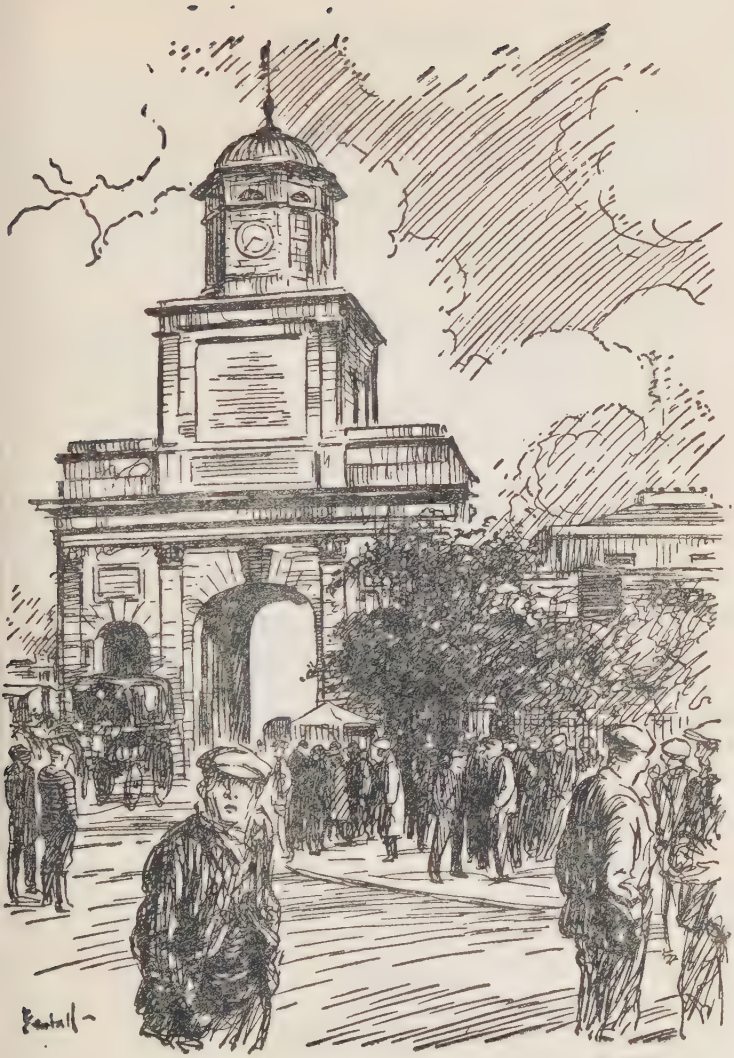
He was clearly a decent sort. He got the money Better still, he paid back every penny.

Chapter VII

POPLAR—YESTERDAY

The church to which Lax went in 1902 was the first Gothic church erected by Methodism in London. It was for years called the Model Chapel, because the authorities hoped that others would be erected on that model. It was a beautiful structure, and reflected great credit on the fathers of the church in Poplar nearly a hundred years ago. It marked the emergence of the artistic spirit in an age of Nonconformist ugliness. Why did our fathers, for the most part, display such woeful disregard for architectural beauty in their sanctuaries? Alas! despite the beauty of the Model Chapel, it was built of a soft Caen stone, and no sooner was it built than it rapidly began to decay. Much of its former glory is now but a memory, and its maintenance is costly.

An interesting historical incident ought here to be mentioned. It is the only Nonconformist place of worship that Queen Victoria ever entered. She was visiting the East India Docks to see some Chinese junks which had been captured in war. Great crowds thronged the streets, and the cheering was so tumultuous that her horses took fright. The young queen alighted from her carriage, and the minister and



THE DOCK GATES

officials, who were standing at the church door, invited her to enter until fresh horses could be procured. On her return to Kensington Palace she showed her gratitude by commanding that the royal coat of arms be placed in the church, and the expense defrayed from the royal exchequer And there it remains to this day.

The church was built to seat 1,200 people. Except for slight alterations to the pulpit and the entrances, it is the same now as it was when Lax entered it. The accommodation for the usual work of a church during the week was terribly inadequate. The Sunday school was housed in a building 130 years old—the first chapel erected in Poplar. As can be imagined, it was inconvenient, insanitary, and even dangerous. Before long it was condemned by the authorities, and had to be demolished. Behind the church there are a few class-rooms, but, in view of the growth of the work, these only emphasize the evil of church overcrowding.

So much for the physical fabric of the church. What about the spiritual Church? The change in the character of the population started movements fifty years ago that can only be regarded as revolutionary. In the old days the tradesman, the employer, the sea-captain and the skilled artisan, all resided in Poplar. When the drift outwards began, the Churches were the first to feel the dislocation. The character of the population entirely changed. The numbers were not smaller; they were greater; but of another order

Families went out in pantechnicons, but the newcomers could be accommodated in costers' barrows! That was the period when half-houses became the rule. In earlier days the prosperous tradesman occupied the whole house. The new order introduced two families to each house. And so the dreadful movement has gone on, until even in the terrace where the minister's house is situated there are to be found as many as four families to a house!

These conditions introduced a new spirit into the district—first, indifference to the claims of religion, then, second, a positive and definite estrangement, which ended in opposition. Thus the church that was formerly filled became empty. Minister after minister came, did his honest best, and, disappointed and depressed, passed on to another sphere.

What about the faithful remnant that remained? They were splendid beyond words. They bore burdens, faced difficulties, and endured disappointments, in the sure and certain hope that a change in the tide of circumstances would come.

True, they were somewhat divided as to the methods to be adopted in order to bring back prosperity. In particular, acute feeling, even anger, was created by Lax's predecessor abolishing the liturgical service. That was the pride and joy of the remnant. The beautiful old organ, the finest in the East End, seemed made for the dignified rendering of the Service for Morning Prayer. This and other changes produced

irritation in the minds of elderly people, who were conservative in their views, and slow to rise to new ideas.

Lax's arrival, it was feared, would involve still further changes, and the few that remained were agitated and fearful.

The first morning in the Manse was heralded by a full post-bag. Over forty letters and post-cards, mostly anonymous, told him that he was not wanted, that the Church would stand no further changes, and so on and so forth.

The choir went on strike ; then the stewards stayed at home ; and altogether things assumed an exciting and challenging attitude.

The congregation at the first morning service was seventeen, and in the evening thirty-five people could be counted. The gallery was closed. Debit balances had accumulated on all sides, and bankruptcy was commonly talked of. Dr. H. J. Pope, at that time Home Mission Secretary, said, ' So you are going to Poplar, Lax ? God help you ! I've just been down there, and I think that if your ministry, under God, is not successful in bringing about a change, we shall have to sell the place.'

But why prolong this dreary description ? Only for this reason—to prove that, however forlorn and derelict a church may have become, and however difficult and depressing its environment may be, *if the people are there, they can be reached.*

Alas ! that this should need saying. In East

London during the last quarter of a century, church after church has been closed—not because there were no people to appeal to, for the population was greater than ever, but because of defeatist ideas that had taken possession of the Churches. They themselves had written ' Ichabod ' on their own walls ! The spirit of holy adventure had departed, and no new vision was admitted to their souls.

Travellers tell us that in Africa they have seen vast tracts of land that were formerly the scenes of a high civilization, with towns, markets, theatres, schools, and all the amenities of a cultured state, but now the desert has overwhelmed them. Inertia, indifference, indolence, must have benumbed the people's minds and paralysed their hands, for they allowed the devastating desert to overrun and destroy their fair lands. To-day these sites are the abode of prowling beast and carnivorous bird. Nauseous plants thrive, and death and decay are everywhere.

The dreadful picture has its counterpart in the spiritual realm. The desert of the world may overrun the fair garden of the Lord.

In some ways, it must be sorrowfully confessed, that this is happening in the East End. Judged by the ordinary test of numbers and moral influence, as compared with forty years ago, Christianity is losing ground. A dead-weight of moral inertia broods over the place. An attack on the mass of evil appears to have the same effect as a blow on a feather-bed.

Thank God for individual cases of striking and encouraging success! These keep the flag flying and shield the workers from despair. We are, however, regarding the situation in its broad aspect. Within recent years more than fifty places of worship have been closed in the East End. With gratitude it may be recorded that only one Wesleyan Church has been so treated, and that was to make way for a larger hall Closed churches, declining congregations, and neglected Sunday schools, can only have one ultimate meaning.

As to the causes of this moral inertia, three at least may be mentioned: (1) The subtle influence of the enormous mass of population, which tends to destroy the personality of the unit. The individual seems to count for nothing; he is simply a grain of sand upon the multitudinous shore of life. (2) The ceaseless struggle for existence, the hazardous adventure of living. Religion is regarded as an addition to burdens already too grievous to be borne. (3) To some extent the influence of anti-Christian Communism. With unceasing reiteration the people are told that the parsons and the Churches are in league with their oppressors!

Lax is sure that the influence of Communism is on the wane in the East End. Their Sunday schools are a failure. As in the past, this mischievous teaching will prove that it carries within itself the seeds of decay.

We must always differentiate between iconoclastic Communism and sane, constructive Socialism. One

is happy to record that in Poplar there are those whose political creed is Socialism, who are working for the good of the people. All honour to them!

Only the Christian religion can save Poplar. Neither Socialism nor any other '*'ism*' can ever be a substitute for the redeemed Church of Christ. If it does not succeed during the next twenty-five years there will be terrible doings. Those who are nearest to the life of the people can hear the subterranean rumblings and sense the hidden convulsions. Only a great revival of religion can rescue Poplar from paganism, with all its dreadful consequences.

The Church of God as a whole has never fully realized its responsibilities towards the great and neglected populations of London. Heaven be praised that Methodism, under the enlightened and daring leadership of men like Hugh Price Hughes and William D. Walters, never allowed defeatist panic to drive her out of a poor area. Her Connexional system enables her to exist where Independency shrivels and withers. If the people were there, then, the Church ought to be there. That was the governing principle of her policy. It is so to-day. Poverty is no bar to the blessings of religion. Because men are sinful, the sweet, pure teachings of Christ should be given them. When they see the highest they must needs desire it!

The experimental stage is past. We are no longer venturing out on a timorous journey, fearful of what we shall find. Some of our comrades have gone far,

and have come back with the fruits of the unknown land, and lo! they are good. Their success is the warrant for our faith. Their labours are the inspiration for our endeavours. Methodism has proved that she possesses the inherent qualifications for survival in the arid conditions of life in a cosmopolitan area. Her evangelistic fervour, her social sympathies, and her faith in the salvability of every human soul, give her a firm hold on the popular imagination and a power of appeal that is capable of achieving great things.

Here it ought to be said, for the benefit of those who are not acquainted with London Methodism, that the Poplar and Bow Mission is in the First London District, of which Dr. J. Alfred Sharp is chairman. There is no district so full of problems, and certainly no chairman could have tackled difficulties more successfully than Dr. Sharp has done. In all Lax's work he has been an invaluable counsellor, helper, and friend.

Nor would any such record be complete without reference to the inestimable service in all problems of East London rendered by the Rev. C. Ensor Walters, the general secretary of the London Wesleyan Mission. Few men know the East End as he does, and few men have been in closer, more sympathetic touch with the work in Poplar. The day will come when adequate historical records will be published of the amazing service that the London Mission and Extension Fund, administered by Mr. Ensor Walters, has rendered to the cause of Christ in London Methodism.

Chapter VII

POPLAR—TO-DAY

To describe a decayed and derelict church is a sad business. It is almost like turning round on your mother. Yet in the interests of truth it must be done.

For three weeks after his arrival in Poplar, Lax prayed, pondered, schemed. Here was a beautiful church, an anxious, if feeble, remnant hoping for the best, but the people of the district might have been on the other side of the Atlantic for all the difference the church made to their life. The great tide of rough, hearty humanity thronged the main thoroughfares—indeed, passed the very doors of the church—but never even looked in its direction ; they simply ignored its existence.

The problem to be solved, therefore, was immediate and pressing. It was how to link on that throbbing, eager, needy multitude to the church. Lax knew that they were not, for the most part, a criminal crowd. They were as sheep having no shepherd ! Moreover, he knew that in the church was something the crowd needed—indeed, the very thing the crowd was unconsciously seeking. He visited from door to door. Here and there he would get inside. Every faculty alert, he was taking in the situation He even went to

talk to the publicans in their bars. He wanted their point of view. He desired to make them his friends. Consequently, they allowed him to invite their customers to his open-air services. He did not at first invite men inside the building. He first wanted a point of contact. That could best be obtained in the free-and-easy atmosphere of an open-air gathering. He was sure that, if he could only get a chance of touching a man, in however slight a fashion, a start had been made. Anything might happen after that.

On the third Sunday afternoon the first of the famous open-air meetings at the East India Dock Gates took place. There were, perhaps, a dozen present. Mrs. Lax played the little harmonium, and she and her husband sang what was practically a duet. This meeting was such an innovation that very few of the remnant put in an appearance. But they came afterwards, and their help was freely given. The crowds grew as the weeks passed. Ultimately the police had to control the traffic in the interests of safety. Through all those happy, busy days Lax was on the best of terms with the police.

There was nothing haphazard about those assemblies. Three hymns were sung, prayer offered, a lesson read, announcements of future doings made, and then the address began. The subject had been announced the previous Sunday, so that everybody knew what would be the topic for the day. The address rarely lasted less than an hour. There was argument,

explanation, enforcement, and, finally, appeal. Questions were invited, and for nearly another hour answers would be given.

To a speaker who loves his job there are few more delightful experiences than to stand in front of a thousand people in the open air! Oh, the thrill of such a sight! There you have the waiting, plastic, raw material of humanity. There you see in their faces the various emotions to which a crowd gives such obvious expression—surprise, incredulity, wonder, hope, and, thank God, one often sees faith writ large. These were the very people who always proved attractive to Jesus. He could never resist the pull of such a crowd, and so Lax found it. Two services indoors and two out-of-doors he held every Sunday for years, besides having many an informal talk on a borrowed chair in some quiet street.

Incidentally, it may be remarked here that Lax has always marvelled that more was not made by preachers of open-air propaganda. He would almost go so far as to say that no man who cannot hold a crowd in the open air should be accepted for the ministry. The thing is so vital to the Church that the point needs no labouring. Hugh Price Hughes used to tell his young colleagues that the ministers hold Methodism in the hollow of their hands. They are the natural leaders of the people. They should, at any rate, be able intelligently and forcefully to declare the message committed to them. And the open air is the finest

training-ground. If the tyro, anxious to know how to do his job, would go into the market-place and watch the seller of wares, he would get at the leading principles of successful open-air speech. He must be *interesting*. Nothing will make up for lack of that. If the crowd is not interested, it moves on. The speaker must, therefore, present his case attractively. He must, moreover, be *sincere*. To the man in the street the *sine qua non* in a preacher is sincerity. He can soon detect the hireling. He knows when the speaker is 'talking through his hat.' Then he must be *convincing*. The man in the crowd is always ready with an excuse why he should not do this or that. Before he will make a move either towards his pocket or towards Christ, he must be convinced.

Open-air speaking cultivates many gifts in the speaker. Readiness, humour, patience, character-reading, all come in the curriculum of the open-air school. Of course, the heckler may always be expected. But he rarely need be feared. He is generally harmless, and patience will go a long way towards making him innocuous. A little illustration of this springs to the memory.

Lax once found a man a considerable nuisance. He was always watching for some opportunity of getting into controversy with him.

In an argument, Lax used as an illustration the obvious fact that two sides of an isosceles triangle being equal they must coincide. When he had

stated the proposition, the heckler called out, ' You are wrong ! You are wrong ! '

' How can I be wrong ? ' asked the speaker.

' Well,' he replied, ' if two sides of an isosceles triangle are equal, *how can they go inside* ? '

The crowd rocked with laughter.

The Gospel of Mutton Chops

An illustration of the way in which open-air preaching brings one into touch with the people may here be mentioned. At the close of one of Lax's meetings at the Dock Gates a woman asked him if he would go and see an old man who lived on the third floor of the house in which she and her family resided. She said that the old man was nearly ' pegging out,' and she did not want him to die without seeing a minister.

Lax found the old man in his room, crouching over a small fire, obviously very ill with bronchitis. He was feeble and wretched. A candle was burning on the table, but so flickering was the light that it only intensified the darkness. It was a dreary abode.

The minister wished him a cheery ' Good evening.' As soon as he caught sight of the clerical collar the man turned away, and without a word gazed into the fire. It was a one-sided conversation, for he did not even give his visitor the courtesy of a word.

Lax called again two or three days later. This time

the man was better in health, but no more disposed to talk than before. He had a fair appetite, but grunted that he had nothing to eat.

A little while before this visit a butcher was converted. One sign of his change of heart was a disposition to be generous where before he had been mean.

'If you come across any poor old chap or woman,' he said to Lax, 'who could do with a beef steak or mutton chop, let me know, and I will send one round.'

It occurred to Lax at once that here was an excellent candidate for the mutton chop, and he told the butcher so.

When he called again in a little while he found the old man more agreeable. For two or three days a very tender mutton chop found its way to that lonely room, and it was plain to be seen that in some way the old man associated the juicy piece of meat with Lax, for he became friendly, even loquacious.

One night he asked Lax to read for him.

What should be read? He asked for Ephesians iii.

'Why, that is my favourite chapter,' said the minister, only too pleased to comply.

'Perhaps you'll pray with me?' suggested the old man.

Lax knelt down. The invalid could not kneel, so remained propped in his chair while the minister commended him to God. Tears coursed down the rugged old face, and his body was convulsed with sobs.

'Tell me something about yourself,' said Lax.

'Ah,' he replied, 'I will do so one day.'

That night the penitent was led along the winding way of repentance to the sure ground of faith. He repeated the familiar lines:

> My God is reconciled;
> His pardoning voice I hear.

His story was a sad one. He was seventy-four. His father and mother were godly people in Cardiff. In drink and in other ways he had wasted himself, suffered a term of imprisonment, fled to America, and, after some years, returned to England, and hidden himself in the East End. He made a precarious living by hawking cheap goods. For a few months he rejoiced in his new life, welcomed visits from the Mission friends, and showed every evidence of conversion.

He died suddenly while Lax was out of London on a preaching journey. When Lax returned, he went to see the poor old man's body, and to arrange for the funeral.

'He left a message for you, sir,' said the woman who lived on the same floor.

'What was it?' inquired the minister.

'Well, sir,' she said, 'just before the end, when his breath was very bad and he could hardly speak, he made a sign that he wanted to say something. So I leaned over him, and very feebly and slowly he gasped:

'"Tell Mr. Lax . . . it's all right. . . . I'm going

to God . . . but be sure to . . . tell him . . . that it wasn't . . . his preaching that saved me . . . *it was . . . those mutton chops.*" '

This brings one to the question of pastoral visitation. It is not easy work, but it is vital. It demands many qualities of heart and mind, but it is one of the most remunerative forms of a minister's service. It is exhausting to body and soul, for there is a distinction to be made between a merely casual call and that which is definitely pastoral. But it is impossible to estimate the results of such service. Nothing can take the place of pastoral visitation. By it the Church is built up. And, what is more, the family spirit is cultivated. The minister becomes a link between one and another. His good cheer becomes infectious, and his friendliness spreads from home to home. Then, again, the people begin to regard him as one whom they can trust. When he has got there he can do almost anything with them.

Lax always emphasized this element in building up the Mission in Poplar. Throughout the years the Church has been one big family. It showed itself in the public services by friendly greetings and hand-grips. The air of a bright expectancy pervaded the worship, and it was clear that the people loved the habitation of the Lord's house. Indeed, it was difficult to get them to leave. The Church was their home. The whole interest of their lives centred

in its worship and its work. They prayed for it, worked for it, begged for it, gave for it! And how they bore burdens for its sake as the years went on! Lax has often said that there surely could not be anywhere such devotion as could be found in Poplar.

In these two ways—open-air preaching and pastoral visitation—Lax declares that Poplar has been built up. It is recorded as one of the traditions of those early days that Lax was not in his own home to tea a dozen times in the first ten years! He lived among the people, and rejoiced in the growing spirit of spiritual desire everywhere seen.

It may be necessary to explain that the work of the Poplar Mission is not carried on in a great central hall, with the advantages that follow such miracles of modern architecture. The people still worship in a Gothic church with seating accommodation for about eleven hundred. There are no tip-up seats. The pews of nearly a hundred years ago are still there. It is just a church, with a bright service and nothing more sensational than the usual order of Wesleyan worship. But the Church grows stronger and stronger in every essential feature.

The Mission is known by the familiar name of 'Lax's.' The members belong to 'Lax's.' To attend the services is to go to 'Lax's,' and a common form of inquiry is, 'Is there anything on to-night at "Lax's"?' The Rector of Poplar once stopped him in the street and put to him a somewhat humorous

ecclesiastical problem—'The Church of England I know, the Congregational Church I know, the Presbyterian Church I know, the Baptist Church I know, but *what is "Lax's"?*' This is cited simply as evidence of the intensely personal and friendly relationship that has grown up between the superintendent of the Mission and the people of Poplar.

During the twenty-five years a wonderful spirit of comradeship has grown up between minister and people. Only that could have justified the long period of service, and nothing but that could have made it tolerable. Lax has always tried to place every member of his congregation under a personal debt of obligation by some kind of loving service rendered. A young man recently came to him. Would Mr. Lax marry him? He had been in all the big events in their family. He had buried his grandfather and grandmother. He had married his father and mother Moreover, he had baptized all the children. Would Mr. Lax come in again and marry him?

The church began to fill. The Gothic proved no hindrance. Cryptic entrances were negotiated, and only when the crowds made them dangerous were they widened and straightened. As an outlet for the desire for service, cottage meetings were begun. In the tenement buildings the songs of Zion could be heard, and conversions were frequent.

It soon began to be felt that pew-rents should be

abolished. This was done, but the people volunteered to give a free-will offering each quarter in lieu of the pew-rent, in order to maintain the Trust and to help forward the work of God. In every Church the principal source of income, as well as the personnel for the carrying on of the various operations associated therewith, must be found within itself. The members are the reflection of the life of the district. They must represent Christ in their own neighbourhood, and at the same time bring the genius and spirit of that district into the Church. Only in this way can the Church become part of the community, and so be as the salt of the earth.

A great challenge comes to the Church to-day to reassert the place of idealism in life. Many political reformers, in these times of unemployment and high cost of living, exalt the material to the almost complete abandonment of the ideal. The only way in which this spirit can be successfully met is by definite conversion. There must be every effort to ameliorate the conditions of life for the disinherited and neglected, but the principal business of the Church is to win the individual for Christ.

The Church of to-day in Poplar has to face two problems that were not dreamed of a quarter of a century ago.

The first is in regard to the widespread propagation of Communism and the activities of that extreme minority which is openly hostile to the Christian

faith. There is little need to dwell upon the developments of recent years. Those who know Poplar best—men in sympathy with the aspirations of the people—aim at a higher standard of life, and are out to push the frontiers of liberty farther back, but are not out for lawlessness. As a matter of fact, the bulk of the people, as was discovered in the general strike, are quiet, law-abiding, and reasonable. The regrettable fact, which has to be faced, is that so many attempts are made, particularly by younger men, to lead them astray and to pour ridicule upon the witness of the Churches.

However kindly and sympathetic a minister may be in his relations with these extremists, that sort of thing he cannot tolerate or condone.

How shall the Church meet this materialistic propaganda? Not by counter political action, but by definite spiritual teaching. This is her one hope. One of the greatest compliments Lax has ever had paid to his work was at a public meeting at which he was not present, when it was declared that the greatest barrier to the tide of Communism in East London was Lax's Mission.

Another problem facing the Churches in Poplar, a problem not conceived twenty-five years ago, is the Sunday cinema. There are probably, within an area of five minutes' walk of the Poplar Mission, not less than ten thousand seats in the various picture theatres. Every Sunday evening there are crowds, mostly of

young people, lining up outside the glittering, flashy cinema halls. About the time the churches are closing a second crowd is going in.

If that sort of thing goes on unchecked, and the young folk are not won into association with the Church, the results must be disastrous. The Church must win in this great contest, or the people will be lost.

At the end of twenty-five years, looking back over those strenuous days and nights, and taking the situation as it now presents itself, the few old folk who are left declare that the golden days of Poplar are not in the past—but in the present.

Lax frequently wants to blazon abroad the names of certain bright and shining souls who in the last quarter of a century have lit up and adorned a grim and trying situation. But, then, where would he begin? And where end? Like the writer of the immortal Hebrews xi., he would have to speak of an illustrious band of . . . and others . . . and others, every one worthy of a place in the Book of Life.

Chapter IX

POPLAR—AND PRAYER

Any one who has even the most elementary acquaintance with the aggressive work of the Missions of Methodism, knows that one of the heaviest burdens a leader has to carry is that of finance. In the case of some worthy philanthropic institutions a secretary may devote his whole time to the circulation of appeals or to deputation work, in order to raise money. In the case of a great Mission, with a live Church and a network of beneficent agencies, the superintendent may have to prepare sermons for Sunday, lead a brotherhood, take classes, organize clubs, guilds, benevolent societies, and what not, visit the homes of the people, and, on the top of it all, exercise his brain day and night, take long journeys, send out endless correspondence, address crowded meetings, in order to secure the funds that are necessary to keep all the activities going. Sometimes such workers say with a smile that when they leave this sphere of service for a higher one, their epitaph will be four words from Scripture: 'And the beggar died.'

Now Lax has had to do a great deal of begging. The work in Poplar has always been of such a character as to touch the popular imagination. And, of course, nothing like the same kind of results could have been

accomplished had not the work been so generously supported by the whole of Methodism. Lax declares that there is nothing in the world like the Methodist Church either in its organization or its spirit. Its organization makes it a simple and definite unity—you touch it at one point and the whole body responds. Its spirit is sympathetic and tender—it is a whispering gallery from which any message of consequence travels from end to end of the land. The genius of Wesley is only now coming into its own. His work is standing the test of time. Surely this extraordinary fellowship, with its exquisite sensitiveness, is the greatest thing of its kind in the world!

It may surprise some people to learn, that, in spite of the many years in which Lax has been appealing to the public for the support of his work in Poplar, he has never been really happy in doing it. A mysterious delicacy of sentiment, unsuspected by many, has made the work a torture. Never a day has passed without sighs and regrets. If he dared have abandoned it, the sense of relief would have been infinite. Only a profound sense of duty to his work has kept him calling to the world for help. That, and the wonderful kindness and generosity of Methodism, have transformed a nightmare into a work of grace.

It should be recorded at the same time that for all the ordinary circuit activities the Mission is self-supporting. The gifts of the people have maintained the ministry, and have continued through the years the

upkeep of the buildings in which the manifold activities of the Church are carried on. Out of their poverty the people have nobly supported the work to which they owe so much. It is for the work of helping the needy, blessing the children, comforting the sick and aged, and ministering to that vast mass of indigent folk, that appeals are made to wider Methodism. Local resources are pathetically and totally inadequate for coping with such tragic and widespread suffering. The East End, with its two millions of a population almost entirely ignorant of vital religion, is as dependent upon outside help as is Calcutta, Peking, or Zanzibar. To do that work is surely the responsibility of the whole Church. Sincere gratitude is due to such as, having felt the need, have responded with such loving spontaneity.

Many strange stories could be told of the way in which help has come in, not through any eloquent speech, but as a direct answer to simple faith and prayer. From the beginning the mission has been conducted in the firm belief that heaven was interested in it. It is God's work. Its needs are daily spread out before Him. Through His servants, the Holy Spirit constantly comes to its help. Perhaps the most remarkable instance of this occurred a few years ago.

How a Debt was Cleared

Restoration of the fabric of the church became necessary. The costliness of the old building has here

as in other cases, been a great burden. The bill came to more than seven hundred pounds. By special efforts part of the amount was paid at the time. Later on, the builders sent in a rather peremptory demand for the final payment. The actual amount was £535, but they said that if the account were settled soon they would let it go for £500.

When Lax opened the letter—more money to be raised—a feeling of nausea swept over him. He wanted no more breakfast. Without a word he passed the letter across the table to his wife. He had not one penny to meet the account.

After a few minutes he asked what she thought could be done.

'We shall have to pray about it,' she replied quite simply.

At the family altar that morning the subject was brought before the Lord, and guidance and help were entreated. Later, he brought up the matter at a Leaders' Meeting. The whole Church was asked to call upon God, and to pray that the way might be opened for a solution.

In a few days Lax received a message from Mr. William Pearce, an employer of labour, a member of the Anglican Communion, and the bearer of an honoured name. The message ran:

'DEAR MR. LAX,—I shall be glad if you could come to see me this morning at 10.45. I leave for G

the City at 11.15, but if you come at the time named, I think we can do the business.'

Lax told the messenger that he would be at Mr. Pearce's office at 10.45.

At that hour he arrived. The commissionaire remarked, 'Mr. Pearce wants to see you, sir.'

'Yes,' replied Lax, 'I have an appointment.'

He was shown into the office, and after the usual greetings, Mr. Pearce said. 'By the way, are you wanting £500?'

'Am I what?' asked Lax.

'Are you wanting £500?' he repeated.

'Yes, I am,' replied the minister, 'of course, for the Church, not for myself.'

'Oh, yes, of course,' said Mr. Pearce.

'Well,' he went on, 'I have received a strange letter this morning.' He spoke to a clerk, who handed a letter to him.

'Just sit down, Mr Lax, and read the letter.' It was as follows:

'DEAR MR. PEARCE,—You do not know me, neither do I know you, but I knew your father fifty years ago. My reason for writing is to say that I have had a strange impression for the past few days that I must send £500 to the Poplar Wesleyan Church. Now, I do not know whether there is a Wesleyan minister in Poplar, or whether the

Wesleyan Church is still in existence there, for I have not been in Poplar for forty-five years.

'However, I cannot get this impression out of my mind, and I thought that you would be able to advise me as to what I should do. My immediate purpose in writing is to ask if there is still a Wesleyan minister in Poplar, if the Wesleyan Church is still in existence, and if they are in need of £500. If the work is worthy of support I shall be glad to have your assurance to that effect. If my impression is wrong, please tear up this letter, and there will be an end of the matter.

'Yours truly,

'John Abbott.'

When Mr. Pearce saw Lax look up from reading the letter, he said, 'What do you think about it?'

'I hardly know what to think,' said Lax, rather feebly. 'It is an extraordinary thing. We have prayed that this £500 should come to us, and here is the very figure mentioned. I have no idea who the writer of the letter may be, and he apparently does not know me.'

'Well,' said Mr. Pearce, 'it is God coming to your help. I shall write to Mr. Abbott and tell him that I know you and your work very well, and that the work of your Mission is well worthy of his support.'

They talked on. When Lax left that office he

hardly knew whether he was on his head or his feet. He felt that something miraculous had happened.

Within three days he received this laconic letter :

'My Dear Sir,—I understand from Mr. Pearce that you are in need of £500 for the work of the Wesleyan Church in Poplar. The impression has come to me irresistibly that I must send you that amount. I herewith do so with pleasure. Your kind acknowledgement will oblige.

'Yours truly,

'John Abbott.'

Lax never met the generous donor. He did not even know of his existence previous to this incident.

Once more we are reminded that 'God moves in a mysterious way,' and so the debt was cleared.

Another remarkable instance of answer to prayer, but of an entirely different kind, may be recorded here

Why Lax Walked Along the Strand

Some months ago Lax had occasion to go to Westminster. After finishing his business there, he turned his face towards the City. He had an appointment in Fleet Street at noon, and found upon looking at his watch that he had an hour to spare. He therefore decided to walk. Going along Whitehall, the rain began to fall, and he naturally turned towards a bus.

Some inward voice, however, spoke to him and said, 'Don't ride this morning.' 'But,' he protested to himself, 'it's stupid to walk in the rain.' Still he walked on to Charing Cross. By that time the rain began to fall more heavily than ever, and Lax decided to take the next bus. Just as he was about to board the vehicle, the voice spoke again, 'Don't ride, but walk.'

'Well,' ejaculated the distracted minister, 'this is ridiculous; I shall be wet through soon.'

Before long, however, the rain moderated, and he came to the conclusion that walking was good exercise, and he would go afoot to Fleet Street! As he proceeded along the Strand a downpour came on again, and he sheltered in the doorway of a suite of offices. He had been standing there perhaps a minute or two, when a man passed, and, having gone two or three steps, suddenly turned round, staring hard at the minister, and said, 'Excuse me, but you *are* the Rev. Lax?'

'Yes, that is my name,' he replied.

'Thank God, then,' the man went on; 'He has answered my prayer.'

'Oh,' said Lax, wondering what was coming next.

'Yes,' said the poor fellow, 'I am in great trouble; I don't know what to do; I prayed God He would send you to my help.' And so he talked on.

'What is your name?' asked Lax.

'Oh, never mind that; that doesn't matter,' replied he, with a deprecatory movement of his hand.

'I told my wife when I left home this morning that unless God sent you to me I should take this and put an end to it.'

He pulled out a small blue phial.

'There is something in this that will put everything right'—and he stared in a dazed way at the bottle.

'You had better give that to me,' said Lax, and, suiting the action to the word, he snatched the bottle out of his hand and flung it on the ground. It detonated like a small cannonshot, and passers-by looked round curiously.

'What did you do that for?' angrily shouted the man; 'I wanted that bottle.'

'Don't you worry about that, you're better without it,' protested the minister

By this time curious people began to stop, wondering what the excitement might mean.

'Let us walk along,' suggested Lax, and they proceeded Citywards.

'What is the matter?' asked the minister

'Oh,' he repeated, 'I'm in deep trouble.'

Passing a Lyons' tea-shop, Lax suggested that they should go in out of the rain, to continue their talk. They went in, and proceeded to the basement, which is mostly frequented by men.

Lax ordered two cups of coffee, and then said, 'Now tell me about your trouble.'

'First of all,' the man said, 'do you remember me?'

'I'm afraid I don't,' replied the other.

'Well,' he went on, 'I haven't seen you for seventeen years. You married me seventeen years ago. I used to attend your mission. I am bound to say that I went because the girl who is now my wife was a member. Oh, those were happy days, sir—they were great days. I have never forgotten some of your sermons.'

He paused, and his head sank into his hands.

'If only I had followed the advice you gave!' he continued. 'But there it is. Perhaps there is some hope after all.'

'Go on,' said Lax; 'what happened?'

'Well,' he said, 'we married, and I prospered in business: so much so, that I could afford to leave the East End, and I took a villa at Bournemouth. God has sent us four children. Healthy, happy little things they are, too.'

Silence followed for a minute or two. Then he started again.

'Unfortunately, I began to drink and gamble, and —worse, until everything has gone.'

Looking up from the table, he said, 'Now don't think I'm after money, Mr. Lax; don't imagine I'm here to beg from you. It is not money I want. I want something here'—putting his hand on his heart.

'My income has been as high as £2,000 a year, but I have neglected my business; I have taken leave of my senses. But, by my extravagance and wickedness, I have unfortunately brought suffering on my innocent wife and children.'

Silence again followed, and then sobs were heard.

'I have just come from Carey Street,' he went on, 'where I have filed my petition in bankruptcy; and now there is nothing but the street for us.'

'Oh, Mr. Lax,' he wailed, 'will you pray for me? Pray for me—now, please! I cannot live in this state!'

The suggestion of prayer in a Lyons' tea-shop was somewhat disconcerting, but the request was so desperately earnest that Lax felt he must do an extraordinary thing. So, rising to his feet, he turned to the few customers near, and said,

'Gentlemen, my friend is in trouble: would you object if I offered a prayer?'

Before they had time to reply he began to pray for his new friend, and then for all the company in that tea-shop basement.

When the prayer was concluded he looked round and found that every head was bared. The company seemed to realize that some tragedy was behind it all. 'I thank you, gentlemen!' said Lax. 'Good morning!'

Some days later, Lax went to see him. He found from his wife that all he had said was true. Little by little, he had mortgaged his effects. The nightmare of coming collapse had appeared before the brave little woman, until she was now at the last stage of despair.

Things took their course. Lax was able temporarily

to help them. He introduced him to a minister near by. The man became an abstainer, and turned his back upon his gambling habits. Sunday by Sunday he presented himself with his wife and children at the House of God.

He is now making a brave effort to recover his position in life. They are poorer than they have been for years, but the radiant happiness in that home is worth going a long way to see.

Lax now understands why he had to walk along the Strand in the rain.

Lord, what a change within us one short hour
Spent in Thy presence will prevail to make;
What heavy burdens from our bosoms take,
What parchèd grounds refresh, as with a shower!
We kneel, and all around us seems to lower;
We rise, and all, the distant and the near,
Stand forth in sunny outline, brave and clear;
We kneel, how weak! we rise, how full of power!
Why, therefore, should we do ourselves the wrong,
Or others, that we are not always strong,
That we are ever overborne by care,
That we should ever weak or heartless be,
Anxious or troubled—when with us is prayer,
And joy and strength and courage are with Thee?

R. C. Trench.

Chapter X

POPLAR VICES

It is not easy to diagnose the deep and widespread disease in the body politic of the two millions known as East Enders. Human nature is always taking us by surprise. It reveals unsuspected depths of infamy one day, while the next shows a very different side.

But one can speak of symptoms, and from that arrive at certain conclusions.

Drink is the besetting vice of Poplar. Intemperance meets one everywhere. It must be said that, since the war, the restrictions regarding hours of sale, and the higher prices of all sorts of alcoholic liquor have produced better results. Indeed, many began to predict a permanent improvement. Alas! that hope seems likely to be illusory. During the past few months there has been a going back towards the dreadful pre-war days. Not many months ago Lax was travelling late at night by a L.C.C. tram, when he was practically the only sober individual on the tram. The conductor had to help each passenger to alight, and expressed his disgust in forcible language.

In the summer time the crowds outside the public houses, drinking on the pavement, and sometimes in

a state of intoxication, dancing and singing, are a disgusting sight. The fact that many public houses have notices in their windows prohibiting drinking outside the premises would suggest that this is illegal. But what can the publicans do? Generally speaking, Lax has found publicans strongly averse to excessive drinking, and always willing to do their best to prevent it. On one occasion he went to twenty-seven publicans and asked them not to serve a certain man who was the victim of periodic alcoholism, and who was on the verge of *delirium tremens*. Every one agreed not to sell to the man, and Lax has reason to believe that all kept their word. The man is now a firm abstainer.

The fact is, drinking is the Poplar man's way of enjoying himself. The same may be said of the Poplar woman. Are they having a 'beano'? Then a big stock of beer must go with the party. Is it a wedding, or a funeral? There must be drink. Is it a birthday? That must be celebrated by a 'booze.'

To see quite young girls walk unashamed into the public house, and, later to hear the streets made hideous by their shrieking and screaming, is one of the most painful experiences imaginable.

And who can see little children waiting outside the public houses, while their parents are inside drinking, without sorrow and shame? More than once has Lax gone inside and begged the drinking mother to take home her child that had gone to sleep on the doorstep Others were kept awake by some little toy with

which they could play. Generally the mothers have no intention of keeping the little ones waiting in the cold. But they meet friends, glass after glass is called for, and, half-fuddled, they forget the children.

At the back of most of the troubles of the East End is drink. If you could abolish drink you would largely cure the ills of Poplar.

Then comes gambling. This is a growing vice, and is becoming probably the most corrupting and menacing evil with which the Churches have to deal. It is so widespread. The inducements to gambling and betting are so subtle that the unwary are led into the vice, and then on to their ruin. Women are as bad as men.

The other day, Lax was going along one of the back streets of Poplar. The paper boy was calling, 'All the Winners!' Women stood on the doorsteps waiting to buy the paper. A little girl of six or seven ran to get the paper for her mother, and on her way back opened the paper, scanned the column like an expert, and then called out, 'Muvver, you've lost!' 'Well, to hell with the horse, and with you, too,' shrieked the mother.

The following letter is typical of literally hundreds that Lax has received. It is of the war period. It tells its own tale.

'*Mr. Lax, Mayor.*

'DEAR SIR,—Having heard that you are trying to get Sunday closing in force I beg to ask could

you not do something to get the drinking and gambling done away with at these working-men's clubs. I am a great sufferer from the —— —— Poplar one. I have six little children and the past four years in the war my husband's wages has been from eight to eleven pounds a week and out of that I have had two pounds to keep my little ones on. All the other has gone in gambling at the above place. I have written the committee and ask them to put a stop to it for the sake of the little children but they only showed the letter to the gamblers and laughed. These are the kind of places to be stopped. My husband is out on strike and has not one shilling to offer for his little children, this kind of thing drives a woman to put these places away. I am also ill from the worry of the struggle and having to sit up until he comes home 12 or 1 o'clock and up again at 6 o'clock and cannot rest in the day with so many little ones so if you can do anything to stop this kind of thing and get these places closed earlier it would be doing many a woman and little child a great kindness and bring love and happiness into their lives trusting you will pardon me for taking this liberty of writing to you

'From a

'Well-Wishing Friend.'

The dreadful suffering revealed in that heart-breaking letter speaks for itself, and needs no elaboration.

Here is another letter taken from the mass and received quite recently.

'Dear Mr. Lax,—I wish you would use your kind influence in suppressing a great nuisance which is going on in this street and has been going on for a number of years. My husband is a drunken gambler, and my children and myself are often without a meal. My husband bets all his money away. . . If my husband knew I had written to you he would kill me. I thought you might get in touch with Scotland Yard so that this bookmaker could be raided. . . . He openly boasted that he can't be caught because he bribes the local police, so you see what a state things are in. . . . I don't want you to come to my home. . . . See what you can do for us. . . . You have great power and influence, but if I were you I would be careful. . . Keep my letter secret and see what you can do for a half-starved wife and five children. God bless you.'

It would scarcely be an exaggeration to suppose that that could be duplicated in nearly every street in Poplar. The spirit of gambling affects the Poplar man's whole existence. He lives from hand to mouth. In a terribly literal sense, 'he takes no thought for the morrow.'

It is true that such folly is by no means peculiar

IS DADDY SOBER?

to Poplar, but it is also true that Poplar spares no pains to act the part thoroughly. The average man lacks foresight to an incredible degree, and his trust in something turning up at the last moment is almost touching in its simplicity.

Here is one case out of hundreds that could be quoted. A man well known to Lax suffered an accident in which he lost part of his hand. He was awarded £65 damages. It is to be supposed that the fellow had never seen a £5 note in his life. In less than a month not one penny of the £65 was left. In gambling, the purchase of silly nothings, and treats to friends, the whole of the money went.

Of all forms of human folly surely the most fatuous and muddle-headed is gambling. It is a dirty business. After a fairly wide knowledge of the ways of gamblers both in Monte Carlo and in Poplar, where the majority of gamblers don't know one end of a horse from the other, it is safe to say that they are fools, all!

Here is another illustration of the type of character produced by drink and gambling, and the suffering endured by the innocent.

What Love Will Do

In the course of his pastoral visitation Lax called one day to see a family in one of Poplar's poorest streets. Father, mother, and two daughters lived their lives in two rooms. That 'home' was the abode of

mystery and tragedy. Mystery, in that they were obviously superior to the social grade to which they had sunk; tragedy, in that the father was the cause of their degradation—drink, gambling, and—worse. His face bore the mark of the beast, his language was coarse and foul in the extreme, and his petty tyrannies over the women of his household were almost unbelievable. In drink he was vile and cruel. The wife and daughters were sweet and patient, and in loyalty to the man never revealed the intensity of their physical and mental sufferings.

As Lax knocked at the door, piercing screams came from within, and pathetic appeals for mercy rent the air; then—silence. Although he banged at the door loudly and often, there was no response. In a frenzy of anxiety he flung himself against the door—once, twice, thrice—then it burst open, and he rushed in. To his horror, the brute of a father, who had come home and found the younger daughter alone, had felled her with a terrible blow, and as he entered was kneeling over her body, and, with demoniacal fury, was actually pounding her face with his clenched fists as she lay unconscious on the ground. Dragging him off the prostrate girl, he flung him into a corner, and threatened to brain him with the poker if he came near her again!

Picking himself up, the man stood sullen and morose, watching Lax wipe the streaming blood from the almost unrecognizable face. As Lax turned to look at the

fellow, a feeling of unutterable loathing passed over him. Slowly the girl regained consciousness, and, looking round, saw her father standing near, still wearing a vicious scowl. She fixed her eyes upon him with the most loving tenderness, and extended her hands as though asking him to come to her. But he never moved. With difficulty she rose, and feebly walked to him, a smile lighting up her poor battered face. Flinging her arms round his neck, she rained kisses on his poor debased face, and cried, ' Oh, daddy, darling, say you didn't mean it ! You didn't, did you ? No, you didn't.'

As Lax looked upon this extraordinary scene, he was transfixed with wonder, and his vision was blurred by incredulous tears.

The Man who was Afraid

A short but terrible story, with a moral. It is given without comment.

Lax noticed a man in his congregation who was continually in tears. He spoke to him.

' Are you in any trouble ? ' he asked.

' Yes, very great trouble,' replied the man.

' Can I help you in any way ? ' inquired the minister.

' Some day I will tell you my story, but I cannot do it now,' was the reply.

This was his story. Drink had soddened his brain. Besides this, he had lived a grossly immoral life. Now

that he was getting on in years, although he was trying to live a cleaner life, he found it very difficult. But the greatest suffering was from memory. The girls and women he had ruined haunted him, and he could get no peace. He had never married. He had been a navvy. He lived on a pension from a club to which he had subscribed for many years. He was genuinely distressed.

He fell ill, and had to undergo a terrible operation, the outcome of the life he had lived. He hoped he would not come through, for life had become a burden. The operation was successful. But it was quite obvious that he would never be the same again ; indeed his days were numbered.

He lived for eighteen months. Lax saw him continually. The man feared death, and begged the minister to be present at the end.

Lax will never forget that death-bed scene. ' I will not die ! ' wailed the poor fellow. ' No,' he went on, ' I refuse to die : I'm afraid.'

Just before the end, he looked up, with a scared and horror-stricken face, and said, ' I can see the gates of heaven open ; but they are all there—the women and girls I have wronged—*and I'm afraid.*'

He passed away with those words on his lips.

Chapter XI

POPLAR VIRTUES

The most outstanding Poplar virtue is good humour. It is a perennial plant, and never fades. It makes a garden of a desert, and produces the most wonderful effects. The looker-on is sometimes taken unawares, and is made breathless by a philosophy of life that is peculiar to Poplar. Man or woman, the Poplar product is nothing but a big, rollicking child. See them on their annual 'beano,' or outing The day is begun, continued, and ended in good humour of the irrepressible sort. It bubbles up and carries everything before it. They dress up according to the fancy of the hour, and, with every conceivable and inconceivable kind of head-dress, faces beaming with merriment, arms flying as they keep time to the cornet or clarinet that leads their vocal efforts, away they go. And the home-coming! With merriment, alas! reinforced by John Barleycorn, they make the welkin ring. Friends, neighbours, children, and others interested, are waiting at the place of arrival. By and by they come! What shouting, greeting, chaffing! A final chorus! 'All join in!' And so a thousand lusty throats sing 'Auld Lang Syne!'

Yes, good humour is one of our great assets. The

Poplar man is a fun-lover. His capacity for fun is enormous. He can see room for a joke in the tightest place. He breathes a jest as he breathes the air. Rarely is his fun cruel. When it is so, it is jagged rather than keen. It does not cut; it tears. His wit is fresh and gloriously original. Also—which is a great thing—it is without fear.

Courage is another of Poplar's virtues. Both men and women have learnt the art of 'the stiff upper lip.' Circumstances calculated to appal the average individual simply call forth the heroic as a matter of course. To thousands life is an unceasing fight with misfortune. In this battle they are often facing terrible odds. But they 'greet the unknown with a cheer,' and meet the next assault with amazing fortitude.

Sympathy, also, is an important element in the moral goodwill of Poplar. The poor help one another. How often it has to be recorded that when Mrs. Boodle is ill, Mrs. Bouncer will take two or more of her children, although she has already five or six of her own! 'Never mind, we can allus make room for another!' And many lonely old men and women, living in the same tenement building, would literally die of neglect but for some rough and formidable female who acts like an angel towards them. Is a neighbour badly off —which in Poplar means starving? Somebody's pocket is always sure to be full enough to spare a copper or two. It is not unusual for a whole street to subscribe to a present in money for a decent man or woman

desperately down on his or her luck ; and the ' friendly lead,' or benefit concert, for a poor fellow who has met with an accident, or is otherwise *hors de combat*, is an established institution.

Yes, Poplar has its virtues in plenty. In some ways they reflect the highest spirit of religion, and can only come from above. They even make the vices almost tolerable. God be praised for good humour, courage, fidelity, and sympathy, whenever and wherever exhibited !

Lax one day jumped on to a bus at the Dock Gates. It was raining in torrents. The conductor was nearly drowned.

' Any sitting room ? ' inquired Lax, looking inside.

' No, Mr. Lax,' he replied cheerfully, ' *but there's a bathroom upstairs !* '

. . . . . .

Overcrowding often leads to frayed nerves and then to altercations among the neighbours. One day Lax observed a little crowd of women and children in a back street. This indicated to his experienced eye that a loud ' conversation ' had been going on. So it proved. It was between Mrs. Blister and the neighbour opposite, Mrs. Byles. Now, Mrs. Blister was not blessed with good looks. Her dearest friend would admit that she was not in the front row when faces were distributed ! In any controversy with the

neighbours this was always her misfortune. It was the vulnerable place in her armour. With many a gibe and jeer they taunted and teased her.

'Yus, Mr. Lax, I must say I've bin 'aving a few words with that beastly Mrs. Byles,' she admitted, when he inquired what the trouble was. 'And o' course, she must make remarks abaht my face.

'Now, I can't 'elp my face,' she went on, 'can I? It's as Gawd A'mighty gave it ter me. But I doesn't charge no rent fer looking at my face; and I sez, sez I, if my face don't suit, well, them as doesn't like it can turn their 'eads the other way!'

. . . . . .

Lax had just married a young couple. The crowd was watching the departing bride and bridegroom.

The following conversation was overheard:

'Well, they're married, Lucy,' said the husband, 'and 'appy is the bride the sun shines on.'

'Yes, that's wot they sez,' replied the wife reflectively. 'But wot abaht me? The sun simply poured dahn August 25, didn't it?'

. . . . . .

A visitor called to see Lax one night, seeking advice in some difficulty. Jack, the minister's dog, barked loudly, and the visitor was nervous.

'Don't mind the dog,' said Lax, reassuringly; 'he won't hurt you. You know the old proverb, "A barking dog never bites"?'

'Yes,' replied the man apprehensively, 'I know the proverb, and you know the proverb, but the dog—does he know the proverb?'

. . . . . .

There had been a fight. It was the culmination of a convivial evening. The street was full of excitement, and the police had difficulty in getting the people to move on. One of the combatants was in a bad way, and was sitting on the kerb, very sorry for himself.

At that moment Lax came up. The police constable was encouraging the fellow to go home. The minister joined in the exhortation. At last the man made a move.

When he was on his feet his hand went to his stomach, as though he was in pain. He blamed a man standing by.

'Did he kick you?' asked Lax.

'Yus, sir,' was the reply.

'*Where* did he kick you—in the abdomen?' inquired the minister.

'No, sir,' he hastily answered, 'in the wash-house.'

. . . . . .

The wedding-party were in the vestry, signing the register. Everything was merry and bright. The bride's father, a big, genial sort of man, was particularly happy.

Turning to Lax, who had officiated at the ceremony, he said, 'Well, sir, I'm proud o' the way you've

married my daughter to-day ; she'll never forget your little sermon ; it was beautiful.

' But I'm going to make a bargain with you, sir,' he went on. ' I've bin married three times already, either in the church or in the register office, *but next time, you shall marry me.*'

. . . . . .

The bride's mother came to make final arrangements about her daughter's wedding. She wanted two hymns. Eva was such a sweet girl and she wanted her to be married nicely.

' What hymns would you like ? ' asked Lax.

She stood reflectively for a minute or two.

' Ah, I remember,' she said. ' " Love divine," for one, and " The voice that breathed o'er *Eva* " for the other.'

. . . . . .

One of Lax's friends, a coster, was ill. A severe attack of laryngitis had laid him low He was silent the fog-horn voice was stilled.

The minister called to see him. Poor Billy couldn't speak a word. Muffled about the throat, he could only wink and gesticulate to make himself understood.

Of course, Lax expressed his sympathy.

' Thank ye, sir,' said Billy's wife, ' I knowed ye'd be sorry, 'cos yer like Billy ; *yer both earn yer livin' with 'ollerin'.*'

. . . . . .

Lax one day was walking along the road when he espied a man whom he knew well. To his surprise, as soon as the man saw his minister he made off down a side-street!

What could it mean? Lax had no recollection of any difficulty that had arisen between them. He was perplexed.

Two or three days afterwards the same thing happened again. Clearly he wanted to avoid the minister Lax worried about it. It was so unexpected.

A week passed. They saw each other in the distance. This time they would meet! When, lo, Lax saw the man deliberately knock at a door, and in half a minute he walked into the house!

This was the third time the man had avoided him. What should he do? Why, he would follow him into the house.

'Is Mr. Jeeves here?' inquired the minister

'Yes,' was the reply.

'I want to speak to him; will you tell him Mr. Lax is here, please?'

He was shown into the front parlour, and in a minute or so Mr. Jeeves came in.

'My dear friend,' said Lax, 'what is the matter? You've avoided me three times this last fortnight. It makes me unhappy, so I've come in to find out what is the reason.'

The man was silent for a minute. Sorrowfully he turned his head to look out of the window.

'Mr. Lax,' he said, 'I'm very sorry; but I have a dead secret, and I was afraid if I spoke to you I should make a fool of myself.'

'What is it?' asked Lax. 'Can I help you? We're old friends, you know.'

'If I tell you, will you promise not to mention it to a soul? I don't want my wife to have the slightest idea of it.'

'You may depend upon my not giving you away,' replied the minister.

'Well, Mr. Lax,' he continued, 'when I saw you the first time I had just come from Dr. Corner's surgery, and he'd told me I have malignant cancer, and only about twelve weeks to live.'

He stopped to take his breath, for he was obviously ill.

'Please,' he went on, 'don't tell anybody. I shall go on as though nothing had happened, but I don't want my wife to be worried.'

Lax sympathized with him.

'I thank you,' he said. 'I've fought it out, and it's all right; I've been to the depths, and now I'm drawing nearer and nearer to the heights.'

Without another word, that brave man walked out of the house. In less than three months Lax stood by his open grave.

. . . . . .

The old lady had been reading *Grenfell of Labrador*, which Lax had lent her.

'What a hawful place to live in!' said the old lady. 'So cold, poor things!'

'And yet,' Lax pointed out, 'Labrador is in practically the same latitude as England.' He explained that the difference in climate was owing to the influence of the Gulf Stream.

'Indeed,' he went on, 'eminent American engineers have long discussed the question of diverting the Gulf Stream to their own coasts which would make England ice-bound, just as Labrador now is.'

'Lor' 'elp us, sir!' shrieked the old dame, 'will they do that?' She was filled with consternation.

'Will they do that?' she repeated. And a terrified shudder shook her frame. 'We shall be all shivers! Oh, dearie me! It's just like them Americans,' she said, in a hoarse whisper, 'they'll steal anything; but if they steal our Gulf Stream *I shall call it a dirty trick*!'

. . . . . .

Lax's mother had just died, and he was naturally much distressed. This gave Poplar a wonderful opportunity for showing sympathy. The people showered their tender sentiments upon him.

'Yer lookin' sad, sir,' said one old lady. 'What is it?'

'I am feeling sad, Mrs. Bundle,' explained the minister. 'I have just heard that my mother has gone to heaven.'

'Well, don't worry, Mr. Lax,' she replied sympathetically, putting her hand on his shoulder. '*P'raps she 'asn't!*'

. . . . . .

Lax was travelling in a bus. A fellow-passenger had to stand, holding on to the strap. Unfortunately, he was drunk. He was genial, talkative, facetious. Indeed, he was a general nuisance. Moreover, he was a danger, for, with the swaying to and fro of the vehicle, it seemed as though any minute he might fall and hurt himself—and others.

Lax got up and offered him his seat.

'Look here,' said the minister, 'sit down in my seat; you'll be more comfortable.'

'Thank ye, sir; yes, thank ye, I will,' said he, and he sat down.

Lax saw that he wanted to speak. He smiled radiantly, as if a heaven-sent inspiration had come to him. So the minister leaned down to listen.

'Yer the only genelman in this 'ere bus who knows what it is to be drunk!' loudly whispered the inebriated one.

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It was a winter Sunday evening. Lax was in his vestry ready to ascend the pulpit steps. The opening voluntary could be heard rising richly from the organ. The stewards had already, as usual, commended the minister to God in prayer. The congregation were waiting for the service to begin.

There was a loud knock on the vestry door. A steward informed Lax that a man wished to speak to him on an urgent matter. It was a well-known costermonger who had a local reputation for being 'handy with his fists.'

'You remember me, sir,' said the man hurriedly, 'I was converted last Sunday night, an' oh, I've 'ad such a glorious week.'

Of course, Lax remembered him, and shook him warmly by the hand.

'I've brought a pal to-night,' said the visitor, with excitement, 'an' you've got to convert 'im, too; 'e's in the back corner seat on the right 'and side.'

Lax protested that he couldn't convert his pal—only God could do that—but he would pray for him.

The poor fellow was quite crestfallen at the apparent uncertainty of the transaction, and he looked disappointed.

'Never mind,' said he, brightening up, ''e's got to be converted somehow, whoever does it; *an' I've told 'im that if he isn't converted to-night, I'll black 'is eye!* Carry on, sir.'

Chapter XII

MAYOR OF POPLAR

In that ever-memorable year of peace, 1918, the Poplar Borough Council presented to Lax the greatest honour in its gift, by electing him to the mayoral chair. Twelve years earlier he had been co-opted on to the council as an alderman. He has had the honour, therefore, of being alderman and mayor without ever having been a councillor. This is unique, at any rate in a Metropolitan borough. The work of a conscientious member of such a body is exacting. Attendance at committees, visits of inspection, and the hundred-and-one jobs that come to a public man keep him busily occupied. Especially is this so in the case of chairmen of committees. Lax took his share of these multifarious obligations, and looks back with satisfaction upon the service he was permitted to render to his borough.

The mayoral year was, of course, exceptional. It was ' Peace Year.' The strain of the Great War had been felt intensely by the whole country. Poplar, like every other place, hailed the Armistice with feelings of profound relief. When peace was actually in being the gladness of the people knew no bounds. The native genius of Poplar found frantic and

flamboyant expression. Every kind of occasion for the exhibition of joy was invented. During the year the Mayor addressed 1,181 gatherings of one sort or another! Every day brought its quota of festivities. The whole population was hilarious, and manifested its joy in original ways.

In keeping with the general sentiment of rejoicing, the Mayor and Mayoress determined that the children of Poplar should play their part. They launched a scheme by which the whole child population of the borough should be entertained in a way dear to the child heart—a big tea, races, and entertainments. Subscription lists were opened, and large sums were speedily contributed.

The difficulty was, however, as to the place where such festivities could take place. There were 41,000 children of school age in the borough, and, unfortunately, the various public halls were small. There was clearly no accommodation to be found under cover.

It was then decided that the festivities should take place in the open air. They took the form of 'Street Teas.' The street was cleared by the Works Department staff. Barriers were placed at each end of the street to divert traffic in other directions. Paper festoons were hung across the thoroughfare, and every kind of original device in the shape of decoration was commandeered.

A Street Committee of fathers and mothers was

appointed to prepare the great meal, and to arrange the sports and pastimes. Kitchen tables were brought out and placed end-on, so that the length of the street provided ample room for the little guests. Chairs and forms, boxes and couches, indeed anything that could be sat upon, were brought into service.

The tea began! Perspiring mothers cut prodigious quantities of bread, and fussy and important fathers carried urns and large replenishments of food! Oh, what a feed!

A little urchin came up to the Mayor, with the profoundest look of dismay on his face. He had had the time of his life! But he could eat no more! What a tragedy! There were stacks and piles of good things. But, alas! he couldn't eat another crumb!

'Never mind, sir,' said the urchin with resignation, 'there'll be another feed to-morrer!' He went on, 'Just fer one day, sir, I should like to be an elephant and a giraffe, all in one!'

'Whatever in the world would you like that for, sonnie?' asked the astonished Mayor.

'Why, sir,' replied he, ''cos if I was an elephant I could eat a lot, and if I was a giraffe, it would take a long time goin' down!'

After tea, the street would be cleared for races. Prizes of various kinds were exhibited in front-parlour windows, and for days before-hand youngsters stood in groups speculating as to possible winners in the

races. Training began in good earnest! It was wonderful!

The races over, dancing began. Father and mothers, boys and girls, joined in. The band was composed of local men. In many cases the dance took the form of a fancy-dress affair. Extraordinary costumes, mostly of paper, were contrived, and the motley assortment of humans and costumes had to be seen to be appreciated.

At a given moment the mayoral party would arrive. The Mayor and Mayoress, the town clerk, mace-bearer, aldermen and councillors, were all there.

Patriotic speeches were made, the Mayor calling for three cheers for the King, and the lusty singing of the National Anthem. Invariably, a telegram of congratulation and loyalty was sent to His Majesty, who always graciously acknowledged the generous sentiments of the Poplar people. At midnight the great party would break up. As no intoxicating drink was permitted, there was no rowdyism. The prevailing note was that of genuine and happy comradeship, and in no place in the world is that spirit more at home than in Poplar.

It was on one of these occasions that the dear old lady came to thank Lax for his hospitality. With hands raised in gratitude and eyes uplifted in amazement, she exclaimed: 'Oh, Mr. Mayor, sir—Mr. Mayor! Oh, *what* a hafternoon!'

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The Mayor in Festive Mood.

Here is a happy bit of romance. A few weeks ago a young woman came to the Mission Sister, and said, 'Do you think Mr. Lax will marry me?'

'Well,' laughed the Sister, 'he's married already.'

'Oh,' said the girl, blushing, 'I mean to my young man.'

Marry them? Of course Lax would—and did.

But he was rather surprised to see the large attendance at the wedding, and to find that the bridegroom was a big, muscular sailor home from a voyage.

In the vestry after the ceremony he ventured to ask, 'How did you two come together?'

'Well, sir,' said the happy bride, 'you remember the year you were Mayor? You and Mrs. Lax were on the hobby horses at the fête you had in the Recreation Ground, and a lot of children followed you round.

'You were just going to start when you noticed a horse that was free next to yours. "There's room for another; won't you come and sit by me?" you said, pointing to me.

'So I got up and rode by your side. I was fifteen then. We went round and round, and when we stopped you lifted me off.

'A young fellow who was standing by said to me, "Do you know the Mayor?" I said, "No; he just asked me to go on."

'That was the first time I spoke to him. We became friends, and he's the man you've just married me to—nine years afterwards.'

The Monarch and the Mayor

Lax has had the privilege of meeting His Majesty the King at three different functions. The occasion, however, which proved to be the most interesting was at a Garden Party at Buckingham Palace in the year of his mayoralty. He had been informed by an equerry that the King had commanded that he should appear before him at 4.15 on the Terrace. Arriving there a little before the time stated, he waited in company with four or five others. By and by, the King and Queen came out of the Palace, and the equerry said he would present him at once.

Upon the presentation being completed the King said, 'And how are my people in Poplar getting on, Mr. Mayor?'

'Excellently, your Majesty,' replied the Mayor. 'Your visit to the East End was greatly appreciated by the people, and they are rejoicing that the war is over.'

'I am glad to hear of their festivities,' said the King. 'Please convey my good wishes to every one in your borough, and say how fervently I trust they may enjoy themselves.

'How long have you been in Poplar, Mr. Mayor?' asked His Majesty.

'Eighteen years, sir,' Lax replied.

'But that is longer than Wesleyan ministers usually stay,' the King remarked.

'Yes, sir,' was the reply, 'that is so.'

'Then why is it that you have been allowed to remain so long?' the King inquired.

'For the reason, sir,' the Mayor replied, 'that the Wesleyan Conference is a wise body, and on occasion, when a man suits a particular neighbourhood, and there is a unanimous wish for him to stay, the Conference drives a coach and four through its own regulations.'

'Oh, I understand now,' said the King, with a hearty laugh, 'and I am bound to say that I think Conference is wise to allow its ministers to stay longer than three years in great areas like the East End of London.

'Do you actually live in Poplar, Mr. Mayor?—that is, do you sleep there?' asked the King.

'Oh, yes, sir,' was the reply.

'And how long do you propose to stay there, Mr. Lax?' inquired His Majesty.

'I do not know, sir,' the Mayor answered, 'how long Conference may permit me to remain, but, so far as I am concerned, I should like to stay another eighteen years.'

'I earnestly hope so, Mr. Mayor,' said the King, with a sympathetic inflexion in his voice.

'And I should like to ask you another question, Mr. Mayor,' continued the King. 'What is the particular message that your Church has to give to the world to-day?'

'That is rather a comprehensive question, sir,'

replied Lax, somewhat taken by surprise, 'but I should say that her message is threefold. The first being the apostolic injunction—"Honour all men, love the brotherhood, fear God, honour the King." The Methodist Church, sir, is a loyal Church. The second, the great evangelical message of conversion ; the third, the absolute necessity of rendering service to the community I think, sir, that these three would very considerably cover the range of the Methodist message of to-day.'

'And is there any considerable increase in your Church ? ' continued His Majesty.

'Actually at the moment, I fear not, sir,' replied Lax. 'The war has made great inroads into all the Churches. I profoundly believe, however, that the spiritual life of the Churches is deeper.'

'Well, I trust that your work will prosper,' said the King, 'and that my people everywhere will find joy in the service they render to the community : that should be our great aim, Mr. Mayor.'

'I am quite sure, sir, that we have your goodwill,' replied the Mayor, 'and it will always be a pleasure to carry in my memory your Majesty's thoughts concerning the work of my Church.'

'Why, Mr. Mayor,' said the King, with a hearty laugh and handshake, 'you will soon persuade me to be a Methodist ! '

Lax smiled at this. Then he ventured, 'I believe, sir, that all men of goodwill have the spirit of Wesley,

and I am quite sure, sir, that, wherever that spirit is found, it tends to the good of the community and the benefit of the world.'

'I am quite sure of that, Mr. Mayor,' assented the King. 'Will you convey to the members of your Church my warm appreciation and regard, and my prayers that God will ever bless your ministry?'

'I thank your Majesty!' said the Mayor.

The interview then came to an end. Lax has always cherished the thought of His Gracious Majesty's intelligent appreciation of the specific doctrines of the Methodist Church, and his warm admiration of its spiritual message.

This is, perhaps, the place to refer to the general question of the minister's relation to public service in the wider sense. Many ministers have been moved by the ambition to render service, according to their powers, on every kind of public body, and even in Parliament. In the last resort, of course, it is a question which every man must decide for himself. In the nature of the case, not many can enter this special form of public service, for the simple reason that only very few remain long enough in a district to qualify for such service.

Lax's deliberate conviction is, however, that, as a general rule, this kind of Christian service is better left to laymen. The obvious retort then is, Why did he himself take it up? For the reason that his scruples

were overcome by the urgency of the pleas put before him. The scarcity of men in a neighbourhood like Poplar, men without axes to grind, men whose sole object was to serve the community, was necessarily marked. It was urged also, that it would be a help, rather than a hindrance, to his spiritual ministrations among the people. In his perplexity he decided to submit the question to his Leaders' Meeting. With one consent they agreed to his taking up the work—indeed, they passed a strong resolution pointing out the advantages of such a course. There was the further argument that in the matter of the public health, housing, and kindred subjects, surely the minister would be rendering help in a form most befitting to him.

This argument certainly did weigh with him. On four occasions he has been invited to contest a constituency for Parliament, but he could, without the slightest hesitation, decline to do so. That was service which, in his opinion, was too remote from the special work he was called to do.

Besides which, there is the ever-present danger of dividing the Church by party political action. That is one of the gravest calamities that can befall a Church.

The fact is, the work of the Christian ministry is so absorbing, so exhausting, so close to the individual soul, that a man needs (to use Wesley's words) 'to have all his wits about him.' He needs, moreover, to

say, like Paul, that supreme servant of Christ, ' This one thing I do.'

Lax's mature opinion, after many years of participation in the public life of his borough, is that a minister can be equally, if not even more, effective if he sticks to his job in the pulpit and the home.

Chapter XIII

A BOLD ADVENTURE IN POPLAR

As the years went by, Lax and his friends were impressed by the urgent need of a centre that might be devoted to the physical and moral development of the teeming thousands of industrial and dock workers and their families whose lot was cast in this vast Borough of Poplar. It was not long before the resources of the Mission premises were taxed to the utmost.

The story is of a kind that is familiar to all who follow home mission enterprises. The case was well put in 1925. The chairman of the Congregational Union, who has spent a lifetime in work among the poor, said, in the course of his inaugural address: 'For any section of the Christian Church to remove itself from labour in the working-class districts is to pass a sentence of condemnation upon its outlook. We get great barracks of working people, and yet, alas! churches of all creeds with sparse congregations. What is more natural than to abandon old and unattractive sanctuaries, and to erect a gorgeous house of prayer in one of the suburbs, to which better-off people can flock? This transition seems to be a matter of common sense and wise commercial management.

It is very easy to organize a large congregation which will still possess every amenity of life, will quickly amass ample financial resources, will be able to gratify every whim, and will appear to be a flourishing indication of energy, enthusiasm, and wisdom. But I venture to assert that that Church is becoming sterile and impotent if it turns away entirely from the needs of poorer folk. Our Wesleyan Methodist friends have lately been aroused to the needs of the inner belt, and have done something to retrieve their position. But for all Churches there is enormous leeway to be made up.'

Whenever one explores the East End, one agrees with the Rev. F. W. Newland as to the inadequacy of most of the religious buildings, first, to attract the outsider, and, second, to minister to the varied needs of worshippers. In these days, when commercial enterprise is so aggressive, and when the latest resources of art and science are put under contribution to produce such magnificent buildings, it is an unnecessary handicap for our churches to be ugly, unadorned, often badly needing repair and paint, and with no adequate advertising facilities.

What is wanted in areas like Poplar is an institution with an inspiration. Long ago, Dr. Joseph Parker, of blessed memory, said in the City Temple: 'It will be a long time before some people can have the prejudice cleansed out of them that the church building is only for distinctively doctrinal purposes. The

Father's house is for everything good. There is no reason, in the necessity of the case, why this church should not be a hospital, a school-house, a reading-room, a place for music and conversation, and instruction in all high and useful knowledge. . . . Poor Church! little-headed, small-handed Church! living along one little line only, and letting humanity go to the devil on the ground of ceremony Would God I could build a Church after my own heart, and have a place to work in just as I want to work in it! It should be all for Christ, and every poor soul in the place who wanted a stick to light a fire should find it in the Church, and every beggar shivering for want of a coat, or pining for want of bread, should find it in the Church. It should be all Church—great, motherly, encompassing, redeeming Church—and should swallow up the State.'

In many of the more squalid parts of the mighty city one can see how the district has changed, how the well-to-do have flown to fairer regions, leaving empty pews which will never be filled, under ordinary conditions, by the working people who are crowded like cattle in mean streets. Yet these people are the Church's peculiar care. She has to adapt herself and her institutions to the times and its needs. The Church must be the home of the people, and there must be the home element and spirit. It is not enough to have good sermons on a Sunday. Good preaching there must be, but there must also be daily practice.

There are hundreds of people in such districts as these who may not be poor in the tragic sense, and yet have no real home life. Look at our shop-assistants, our clerks, our apprentices, who, after business hours, go for a run in the street before turning into their lodgings. It has been well said that hell opens a hundred mouths to swallow up these young folk. They are young people with a little money to spend, and with warm blood coursing through their veins. There must be a proper outlet for their pent-up energies at the end of a day's confinement. Why should the devil provide it?

Here in this seriously-overcrowded Borough of Poplar, 'home' for thousands merely consists of one or two rooms. Thank God that in some of these, even though the necessities and comforts of life may be small, or, indeed, absent altogether, the family life is founded on love. That is what Christ does for people. He transforms a den into heaven on earth. But what about the thousands who have no religion? The evils attendant on overcrowding have their roots in the economic problem, and we are not competent to cure them, even for our own people. Much can, however, with the warm sympathy of friends be done to relieve the conditions of the people, and help them to help themselves. It is here that the Poplar Mission can render its most effective social help.

Another vital problem, and one of peculiar difficulty, is that of reaching and helping the youth. Thousands

of young men and women have only had a most elementary education, and no technical training qualifying them for anything other than casual labour in the docks and factories—to-day more precarious than ever it was Hundreds of them have reached the early twenties, and have never yet succeeded in obtaining decent employment of any kind.

The task confronting those who work in Poplar is so immense and so complex that all are compelled to use their full powers to influence and brighten the lives of the people. The best method is not always clear, but it frequently happens that 'the way' is opened.'

Soon after the end of the War, a great opportunity came to extend the facilities for work among young people. The Mission Sunday-school used to meet in an adjacent street. It was in the old Wesleyan chapel —the first built in Poplar. The place was 150 years old, and in a state of dilapidation. A few years later the London County Council condemned it as dangerous, and it had to be demolished. For five years the Sunday school was homeless, and had to take shelter in the church, which was, of course, unsuitable for Sunday-school work.

Lax, and those who had stood by him for years, set to work. An old building belonging to the United Methodist Church was acquired. It was situated only a few yards from the Mission church. They obtained the sanction of the Rev. Simpson Johnson

King George's Hall and Institute.

and the London Mission Committee to take it over. Lax appealed to the King for support, who caused inquiries to be made as to the work done by the Mission, and by His Majesty's special command it was named the King George's Hall and Institute. It was reconstructed from top to bottom. Now it forms a Sunday school and social centre.

The hall was completed at a cost of £36,000. Of this sum, a generous anonymous donor gave £10,000. Originally the estimate was set down as much less, but tremendous difficulties arose through no fault of the Mission officials.

They were compelled to provide the hall for the following reasons :

1. They had no Sunday school for their 800 scholars.

2. Accommodation was required for the clubs and classes for the young people. The peculiar conditions of life in Poplar made it necessary to provide a ' home ' for the boys and girls whose home life is at a great disadvantage.

3. The terrible temptations put in the way of the young men and women, such as gambling-clubs, dancing-halls, and drinking-saloons, called out to the Church to make provision for their protection.

4. A ' point of contact ' was wanted between the vast multitudes outside the Church and the Mission activities. That has been accomplished by King George's Hall and Institute.

Some months after the hall was opened an interesting

incident happened. Lax was met in the street by an old inhabitant of Poplar. He was not associated with any Church, but was generally regarded as a man of character and shrewd judgement.

'I have seen your new hall,' said the man, 'and have spent some hours in your Institute.'

'I am very pleased to hear that,' said Lax. 'What do you think about our new scheme?'

'Oh,' he replied, 'it is splendid beyond words; it will do no end of good among the people.

'But there's another thing,' said he, lowering his voice and putting his hand on the minister's arm. 'I said to myself as I looked at the men and youths who were gathered there, Now Lax's Mission will live: *he is keeping in touch with the raw material.* I have seen many churches closed in East London—all because they never cultivated a point of contact, in a human way, with the multitude. God bless your efforts.'

Another incident sheds suggestive light upon the actual working of the great scheme. A man, quite unknown to Lax, stopped him in the street one day.

'I want to thank you for what you are doing for my two boys.' He mentioned their names. They were both in the twenties.

'The younger of them,' he went on to say, 'was coming home drunk night after night, and the elder was getting very slack: their mother and I were very worried.'

'I am sorry to hear that,' said Lax.

'Ah,' the father continued, 'but I'm glad to say that since they joined your Men's Club neither has taken a drop of drink.'

The great day came at last. The month of November, 1920 will form a milestone in the history of Methodism in Poplar. The Duke of York, self-possessed, the model of courtesy, keenly interested, declared the new hall opened, and then accompanied Lax on an informal tour of the premises. It was indeed a happy day for the Mission. The King George's Hall and Institute was opened as a great and worthy memorial to the men of Poplar who had fallen in the war. 'To honour the Dead and inspire the Living.'

The ceremony of inauguration was delightful. The then Lord Mayor of London (Alderman James Roll) was present, with the sheriffs of the City. The Duke of York, with the gracious friendliness and homeliness which the Royal Family always display on such occasions, inspected a guard of honour, and was presented with a key by the architect, Alderman Josiah Gunton.

At the opening meeting His Royal Highness conveyed the good wishes of the King and Queen. It was indeed a red-letter day in East India Dock Road. Friends from far and near came to rejoice at the inauguration of the great adventure upon which Lax had lavished such faith, hope, and love.

The advantages of the new movement were immediately felt. The Sunday school at once increased in

numbers. Nowhere can happier crowds of children be seen on Sunday afternoons than those at King George's Hall and in the church premises near by. There are over eight hundred scholars in attendance—sharp, intelligent, and disciplined youngsters. The work among the young is perhaps the most hopeful of all. It is often said that a fence at the top of a precipice is better than an ambulance at the bottom. This book tells, not only of men and women who have been saved in middle or later life, but of the even greater work that is done to safeguard the young.

Modern movements among boys and girls are utilized to the utmost. Guides and Brownies, Scouts and Cubs flourish. All that is best in these great and useful institutions find their place in the Poplar Mission.

Incidentally it may be explained why such wide-spread use is made of these secondary aids to the work of the Church. Criticism has been levelled at the so-called militaristic element in them. Indeed they have been branded as part of the military apparatus of the country.

Lax is satisfied that this criticism is unjust. There is no militarism in these movements. The very opposite is the truth. Nothing is frowned upon more sternly than the military spirit and method.

What is sought after is the inculcation in the child mind of the principles of citizenship, the recognition of law, obedience to authority, reverence for truth, and the team-spirit. At a time when admittedly

parental discipline is at a discount, when youth claims to choose its own course, and when the difference between liberty and licence is so slight, surely none would look askance at any movement which aimed at the building up of character at the formative period of their lives.

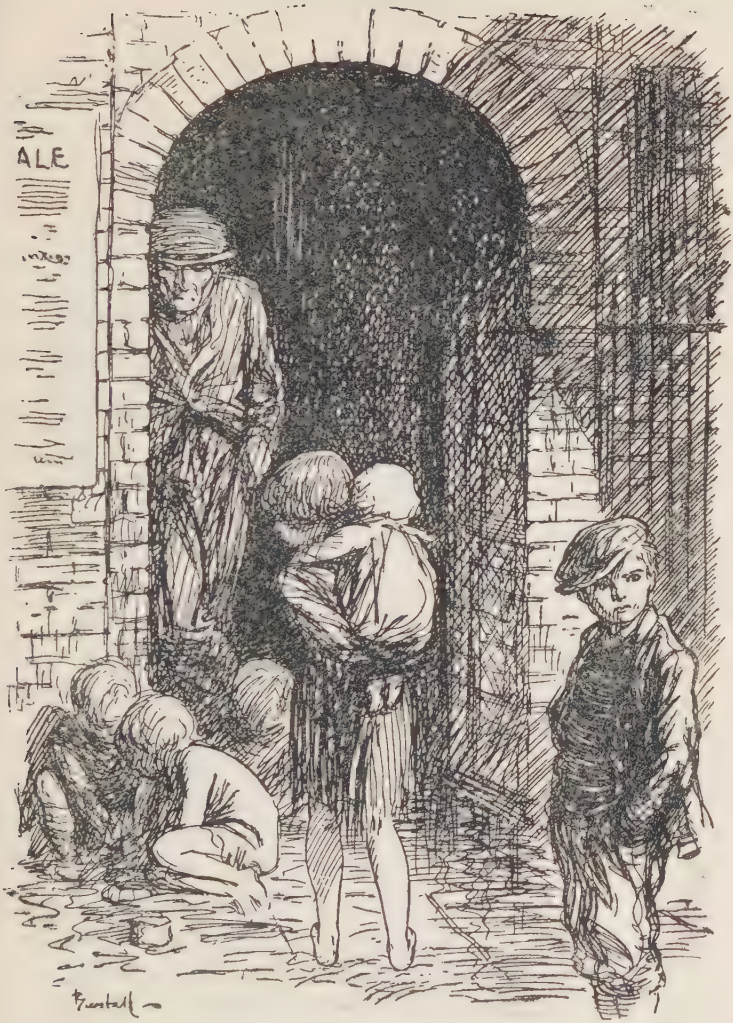
Religion has many facets, and sends out its light in many directions. These movements are all designed to develop in their own way the religious instinct, and to exalt the ideal of individual achievement. Hero-worship, the kinship of all life, the inter-relation of all human endeavour, the unity of all races and peoples, are some of the subjects taught and some of the objects aimed at.

On the Mission premises all sorts of opportunities are provided for social recreation. Classes are held, and there are also excellent facilities for physical training and gymnastics for the young women and girls.

The Boys' Club is a rallying-place for boys who need a home from home, and whose moral character needs protection in the dangerous period of adolescence. The Young Women's Club provides that genial and sisterly centre where all sorts of helpful and happy relationships can be formed. It is doing untold good to the future wives and mothers of Poplar. Moreover, there is a splendidly-equipped and up-to-date gymnasium for boys and girls, and young men and women. Trained instructors and instructresses are in attendance, and many a feeble body and halting mind has

received an impetus that will be felt as long as life lasts. The need for these human and recreative agencies will become apparent when it is understood that in such an immense area as Poplar, with its population of 180,000, there are only twenty acres of open spaces wherein young people may play, and these twenty acres include churchyards which have been thrown open to the public.

Here mention may be made of the sad deterioration that frequently comes into the lives of growing boys and girls. As children they are full of charm and simplicity. At fifteen years of age they are apt to become coarse and brutal. It is at this stage that the hooligan evolves. How to deal with this class of youth is the problem of all social workers. The root of it is deeply embedded in the home conditions. The child is thrust into the street from his tenderest years. There is literally no room for him. There are six or seven of them, and the narrow confines of two rooms allow no space for play. How often has Lax seen a child throw a pebble at a window three floors up. His mother looks out and sees Tommy. The pebble is the sign that he wants his dinner. She throws down some scraps of food in a piece of newspaper. That is poor Tommy's dinner. He sits on the kerb to eat it. He is then at liberty to prowl about, like a little animal, seeking his own pleasures and finding all kinds of inducements to get into mischief. It is then and there that he learns his evil habits. He



'THESE LITTLE ONES'—AND A POPLAR SLUM

hangs around the public-house door, or tries to steal into the cinema by the exit door—for a free seat! He is made sharp as a needle, as insolent as a boor. The primeval savage in him is developed, and ultimately you have your hooligan.

The Men's Club is meeting a real need. Mention has already been made of the gambling-clubs, dance-halls, and drinking-clubs that abound in such areas as Poplar. How much evil is perpetrated in such places can never be estimated. The appalling total of misery issuing from these haunts of vice is beyond imagination. The King George's Hall Men's Club is Lax's reply to the challenge of the devil. The Church can provide better things for its men than places whose whole object is to exploit and despoil them. The Mission Club has often been described as a magnificent public house without drink. Membership is open to all men over eighteen years of age. A small fee is paid for membership. There are few vexatious rules, but gambling and drinking are absolutely and sternly prohibited. Hundreds of men have already availed themselves of the opportunities for rest and recreation under conditions of perfect freedom and ideal comradeship. Lax believes that one way of combating Bolshevik propaganda is to provide facilities where men can meet happily and freely, and where the best type of Christian ideal can be seen in active operation. There is a billiard-room for men, with four tables, open from 2.0 p.m. to 10.30 p.m. There is another room, for

youths, with billiards, and tables for chess, draughts, dominoes, and other games. The canteen is open throughout the day. The whole scheme of recreative and reformative work is conducted under religious influences, and with the one master-motive of saving those for whom Christ died.

Lax has no illusions in regard to the limitations of this kind of Christian service. It is no rival of the Church, and cannot take the place of the sanctuary in the strict sense of the word. But it does prove a link with the deeper and essential experiences of religion. You cannot save men by billiards. But in cases such as exist by the thousand in Poplar, where there is no room in the home for the youth when he returns from work, and where all sorts of devil's agencies are waiting for him with open arms, it cannot be wrong or futile to stand in Christ's name and find a place where he may at least have a chance of growing up in the fear of God.

Here, then, is the scheme, and here the ideal is set up. In addition to the provision already mentioned, there is a lounge, a library, a games-room, and a refreshment-room and buffet, where food may be obtained at a small charge. In connexion with the club there are auxiliary clubs for football, cricket, swimming, thrift, and so forth. These are well patronized by the members, who have a large share in the management, appointing their own representatives on the committee.

Nobody knows better than the Mission worker the colossal magnitude of the task and the multiplicity of its difficulties. The Mission has to face it in the spirit of scientific exploration and adventure. That involves continually taking stock of the methods adopted, and a review of their application from every angle of vision. To this end the modern Mission has, undoubtedly, an increasingly important function to fulfil. New factors have risen since the War which have to be taken into account. There must be the unceasing search for the right perspective, with due regard to the relationship of the State, the municipality, and industry to the affairs and the life of the people.

Chapter XIV

POPLAR MIRACLES

The ultimate aim of all preaching is the renewal of the human heart. That is the final goal of the preacher of the evangel. It may take different forms and be brought about by various means, but renewal there must be if humanity is to be saved from wreckage. It may be as sudden as an earthquake, or as gradual as the dawn. But it must be.

After a quarter of a century in one of the most baffling areas in London, Lax would say that there is no reason to despair, if only the Church does her duty. She must seek fresh guidance and accept the challenge of the conditions in the full assurance that Christ holds the key to the solution of all problems, however difficult they appear. Christ is equal to the worst that can be brought to Him. So has Lax seen again and again. The triumphs of the grace of God are recorded in the lives of renewed characters, 'known and read of all men.'

The Bos'n's Story

Late one night Lax was returning from the Isle of Dogs, where he had been preaching at one of the smaller branches of the Mission. It was doubtful if he would catch the last bus. By running hard he

just reached his objective in time. Jumping on to the footboard, he discovered one vacant seat, and soon was comfortably settled waiting for the vehicle to start. Like himself, his fellow passengers were weary : at 10.30 on a dreary November night nobody is particularly lively.

Suddenly that somnolent company was electrified into wakefulness by a loud voice calling, ' Ship ahoy ! Ship ahoy ! ' Like a thunderclap it rent the misty air. Every eye was turned towards the door, and in a moment or two there leapt on to the bus a big, half-drunken sailor. He had a voice like a Bull of Bashan. His volubility was artificially stimulated by liquor, for he talked ceaselessly to individuals. Moreover, he addressed each one as though he were a multitude He was facetious, too. He wanted to sit on an old lady's knee ! She objected vigorously. He called ' Beaver ' to an old man with a beard. Indeed, he was a nuisance. Goaded at last to take notice, the conductor threatened to put him off the bus if he did not behave. Poor fellow ! The conductor was a thin, cadaverous little man. The sailor was a giant in stature ! It was laughable.

' Ye'll chuck me orf the bus, did ye say ? ' sneered the sailor. ' Why, I'll make mincemeat of ye, ye blasted little whipper-snapper '—and he looked as though he would. Holding on to the strap, he swayed with the movements of the bus, and kept his eye upon the diminutive conductor.

'Ye'll chuck me orf the bus!' he continued. 'Ye'll chuck me orf the bus!' And with the persistency of the fuddled sailor he spat out his contempt for all landlubbers.

At that moment the man seated next to Lax alighted, leaving a vacant place. Into this seat the sailor heavily dropped.

With eyes closed and chin on chest, he muttered imprecations on everything and everybody. Then silence followed.

At length, turning to Lax, he said, 'I know I'm drunk, sir! I know I'm drunk,' he repeated.

Then he turned fiercely to the conductor, and shrieked at the top of his voice:

'Ye'll chuck me orf the bus, will ye!'

'Never mind him,' urged Lax; 'take no notice of him.'

Silence followed for a minute or two.

'Yes, I know I'm drunk,' he murmured, 'but nobody cares; I'm only a pore sailorman, and nobody cares a damn!' Silence again.

'Ah, there is somebody that cares,' he went on; 'that's my mother; and she's eighty-three years old; she cares; and when I go in to-night she'll say, "Ted, my dear, I'm sorry to see ye drunk."'

'Well,' asked Lax, 'and what will you say, mate?'

'I'll say, "Mother, I won't drink no more while I'm ashore this time!" And I won't! Hear me, sir?'

'Give me yer hand, sir!' They shook hands on it.

'Where do you live?' asked Lax.

'Grosvenor Buildings, sir'—and he gave the number in that great tenement agglomeration of men, women, and children.

At the Blackwall Tunnel the bus emptied. The conductor thought it advisable to get out of the way. The sailor sought him. The air was filled with lurid language when he discovered that his man had gone.

A few days later Lax went to the address in Grosvenor Buildings. On the fourth floor he found Ted Jones and his mother. Ted was the sailor in the bus incident. His mother was a sweet old lady. Ted was her sorrow.

'He's so good, sir,' said she, 'when he's sober. So he was. But when ashore he was seldom in the 'good' condition.

He lay dead drunk that afternoon. With bruised face, loudly snoring, he was a pitiful object.

The next time the minister called he was sober. He would soon be off to sea. And blanketty glad he would be to be out of the East End again!

After a few months he came home once more. A friendship sprang up between the two men.

One Sunday night Lax's heart leapt within him to see Ted Jones in the gallery of the church.

'If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me!' That was the

challenge of the sermon. Would any one accept the challenge?

'Yes, I will!' came from the gallery. It was Ted Jones.

The suddenness of his reply was startling. Two other men nodded at the preacher, in similar acceptance, as though they were at an auction.

They came to speak to Lax after the service. Ted had clearly been drinking, but he knew what he was doing. He was sick of liquor. He would never touch another blinking drop!

The minister shook his hand, and encouraged him to keep his word. With quivering voice he replied, 'No more liquor, sir; no more fooling about. This is the end of it.'

He never touched another drop. The breach between Ted Jones and the public house was absolute.

Within a few days he went back to sea. After a short stay in Antwerp, he returned to London. He looked better. His face was clearer, his step stronger.

He came to meetings of various sorts, and was curious concerning the ways of the people he met there. He was entirely strange to religious worship.

The war was at its height. Ships were sent to the bottom every day. The Germans seemed determined to sweep every British ship off the oceans. Things were serious.

Still, sailors stuck to their job. It was wonderful—

this dogged holding on! Every man that went to sea was a hero.

One day Lax was in his office, and the caretaker said a sailor wanted to see him.

'Come in!' called Lax; and in walked Ted Jones.

The minister inquired how he was getting on.

'Oh,' said he, 'I've had a bad time. I've been torpedoed, and lost everything; will ye lend me a quid, sir?'

'Certainly, Ted,' replied Lax. 'Two if you like.'

'No, sir, one'll do,' he said.

The minister took out his wallet and passed a Treasury note across the table.

'Now, sit down, Ted, and tell me what you have been doing,' said Lax.

'Oh, I've done nothing,' was the answer.

'All right then,' said Lax, 'sit down and tell me about nothing. You say you were torpedoed?'

'Yes,' he replied.

'Where?' asked the other.

'Well,' he went on, 'I was sailing in the *Russian Prince*. We got through the Channel, and were going down by the Portuguese coast, when we picked up a boat with the remnant of a crew that had been torpedoed by a German submarine. There were five men, two women, and a kid. We got them safely aboard our ship, and looked after them. Of course, everybody made a fuss of the kid. Things went well until we were nearing Gibraltar, when early one morning the

man on look-out saw the wash of a submarine. There was a shout, " Hard a-port ! " But it was too late. The submarine struck us on the starboard side, and we got it in the neck, and no mistake ! The poor old ship heeled over. The order was given, " Every man to his station ! " I went to my boat and found that the two women and the kid were being put in.

' It was bitterly cold,' he continued, ' so I ran down the companion-way to the galley, and got hold of some loaves and other things to eat. There was some water in the keg. Then I got some blankets for the women and the kid. After throwing them into the boat, I jumped in after them, and found myself near the stern of the little craft. We soon began to put ourselves to rights, pulled a little distance out, and turned round in time to see the old bus take a dive —and she had gone.'

' How many were in the boat, Ted ? ' asked Lax.

' Nine men, two women, and the kid,' he replied.

' And what happened then ? '

' Oh, we were five days and four nights before we were picked up,' said Ted. ' Bad weather came on, and we were all pretty miserable.'

' I suppose the kid died ? ' suggested Lax.

' No fear,' Ted replied ; ' we looked after that.'

' Well, I suppose the women couldn't stand it ? ' was suggested.

' Oh, yes, they were all right,' said he. ' The chaps made up their minds that they would let the women

and the kid have the blankets, and that they would just have one slice of bread a day, so the women and the kid should not go short.'

'And what then?' inquired Lax.

'Well, it was dreadful,' said he. He didn't care to talk about it. 'After the first night one of the chaps went dotty, and tried to swamp the boat, so we had to chuck him overboard to save the rest.'

'Horrible!' said the minister.

'During the next three days four more of the men died. They got pneumonia or something, and so they "went out." When we were picked up there were only four men left and the two women and the kid.

'The people on the ship looked after us well, but I lost everything. At any rate, I shall soon get another ship,' he consoled himself.

'Well, Ted,' said Lax, 'I'm proud of you. Thank God for you and all such sailormen who brave the dreadful days and nights and do their bit like true Britishers!'

'It's nothing, sir, nothing,' said Ted; 'it's only what any sailorman would have done.'

After a few minutes Ted left the office. He didn't return for a few weeks.

When he did return he came to the men's class, found his way to the Sunday service, and had a parting cup of tea in the office. His mother had died. He was lonely ashore.

He was then going to South America. He knew

the risk he was running, but had made no will, for he had neither wife nor child. He was just one of the lonely wanderers on the sea of life.

Before he left the office he said, 'Look here, sir, I want to pay you back the quid you lent me, and here is ten bob for interest.'

'Nonsense!' said Lax. 'I will take the pound, but no interest, thanks!'

'Well,' continued Ted, 'here is £10'—and he counted out ten pound Treasury notes.

'What's this for?' asked the minister.

'I want you to hold it for me,' said he. 'But if I don't come back,' he added, looking the minister straight in the eye, 'I want you to spend it on some poor kiddies who have been as badly off as I've been.'

'Very good, Ted,' said Lax; 'you may expect me to do as you wish'

He was commended to God in prayer.

Shortly afterwards his heavy footsteps rang out as he went along the flagged passage leading to the street.

Lax never saw him again. He boarded his ship in the Millwall Dock. Submarines were then doing their worst, and that ship was never heard of again. Probably somewhere in the South Atlantic she went down with all hands.

Lax is sure that at least Ted Jones went down like the brave man he was, and that to-day he is somewhere not far from the Throne, where the King has said, 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant!'

Five years after that the £10 was spent in sending children to the seaside to regain health after sickness. Lax knew no way of spending that money—and such sacred money, too—that would more perfectly meet Ted Jones's wishes.

. . . . . .

Here is another of a different kind, but one that is representative of many.

Doggie Bonner

Lax was visiting in some tenement buildings. While in conversation with two women, he heard the repeated snarls and yappings of what sounded like a terrier dog.

'Where is that dog?' he inquired; 'it must be a vicious beast.'

'That ain't no dog: that's "Doggie Bonner,"' one of them explained.

'Doggie Bonner!' he repeated. 'What do you mean?'

'It was our next-door neighbour,' they said. 'When he is drunk he snarls and yaps and barks like a dog; so he's got the name of Doggie Bonner.'

Thinking this was an extraordinary story, Lax determined to find out whether it was true or not.

Accordingly, he knocked at the door pointed out as the residence of Doggie Bonner.

A slatternly woman answered the knock.

'Good afternoon, Mrs. Bonner,' said Lax. 'Is your husband in?'

There were lines of tears on her face, and the minister suspected brutality as he saw the scars near her eyes.

'Yes,' she said 'Do you want to see him?'

'I want to have a chat with him,' explained Lax.

'You cannot see him,' said she; 'he's drunk and he's dangerous.'

'Never mind that,' said the minister; 'I shall be all right; he won't hurt me.'

He walked into the room. There he found the drunkard lying on a dirty, disreputable sofa. When he saw Lax he set up a bark and a snarl like a dog, and showed his teeth in a realistic way.

'Good afternoon,' said Lax, and sat down near the man. At this he rose on his elbow, and hissed out, 'Who are you, and what do you want?'

'You know very well who I am,' replied Lax, 'and you know what I want.'

'Yes,' he snarled, 'you're little Lax, and you want me to sign the pledge.'

'Well, I don't think you'd be any the worse if you did sign,' the minister went on. 'What do you think, Mrs. Bonner?'

Afraid of him, she dare not express an opinion.

They talked for an hour. He gradually got more sober and reasonable. Lax learnt that this name had stuck to him for years. So brutal was he, so dehumanized had he become, that when in drink he literally was a being to be despised. He had no reputation, except for bestiality.

After a few weeks Lax prevailed upon him to come to an evening service. To do this he had to fit him up with clothing. His whole wardrobe was not worth sixpence.

He came. Seated in a back pew, his eyes surveyed the strange scene of people at worship. He looked scared.

But he came again, and again. In the meantime he was taking less drink

One Sunday night Doggie determined to live the new life, and told the minister so. The news spread. His old boon companions were incredulous. He would soon be at the Spotted Dog again!

But, no! Doggie Bonner was a changed man. His life was transformed, his heart was renewed, his ideals were heaven-born.

It was curious to see the gradual readjustment going on. But it was wonderful to discover how God dwelt in the thoughts and schemes of Doggie Bonner. It was difficult to leave behind his old habits of speech. He was worried over his lapses into profanity. But he won. He always found it difficult to adapt himself to theological propriety, but the beauty of his life and, oh! the rapture of his religion were things to remember.

After some years he left Poplar, to live in the country The dissipations of his early years had almost ruined his constitution. So he resided for awhile in the quiet of rural scenes, and earned a living by gardening and

poultry-keeping. There he lived a life of spiritual beauty, still bearing the marks of sin, but, as an old house is lit up from within, so his pure soul shone through the chinks of physical weakness. The old name of Doggie Bonner had gone, and Mr William Bonner was respected by every one.

Chapter XV

MORE POPLAR MIRACLES

Here is another story, which might well be called:

The Prodigal's Return

> Dear Mr. Lax,—A great sorrow has come to our home. Nine days ago my boy, Arthur, ran away, and I am full of anxiety as to where he is. Yesterday I received a post-card bearing the London Eastern postmark. Evidently he is near you. Should you come across him, please be kind to him, for his mother's sake.'

That was a letter Lax received from a friend who lived in a town on the south coast. He had preached in the town several times, and on each occasion had been a guest in the home of the gentleman who wrote the letter.

The boy was nineteen years of age. He was the only child. He had a wild disposition, strongly resented discipline, and at times was positively vicious in temper. He was a problem. It transpired that his latest escapade had been to steal £170 from his father's safe, with which he decamped, leaving no trace of his whereabouts. Since Lax last visited the town the boy's mother had died. One could not resist the

suggestion that his thoughtless, cruel conduct had hastened the end of that gentle, anxious woman.

He replied saying that he would certainly be on the look-out, and asked for a photograph of the boy, that Mrs. Lax might be able to recognize him should she meet him in the street.

For a fortnight there was no sign of Arthur. One day, however, Mrs. Lax said she thought she had seen the lad, but did not like to speak to him. Her husband expressed his surprise at such finicking regard for the conventions, and urged that if he crossed her path again she must bring him to the Manse.

He was not fortunate enough to set eyes on the youth, but three days afterwards Mrs. Lax again saw him.

'Good morning,' she said. 'Aren't you Arthur B——?'

'Y-yes,' he replied:

'My husband and I have been looking for you for ever so long; won't you come home with me?' she urged.

They turned towards the house, neither knowing what to talk about. When within ten yards of the gate, he darted forward and bolted as fast as his legs would carry him. The minister's wife stared after him with amazement.

Going in, she told her husband what had happened. Lax expressed his indignation at her failure rather forcibly.

'What a stupid thing to do—to get him so near the house and then to lose him!'

Two days afterwards Lax saw him. The lad recognized the minister, and appeared glad to see him. He was invited to tea. Walking by his side, they talked of home affairs. Soon they were at the door, and, while Lax was getting his latchkey from his pocket, the truant turned and ran like a hare.

Disappointed, he told his wife of his failure. 'What a stupid thing to do,' she said, 'to get him so near the house and then to lose him.' She had scored!

The humorous element in the escapade brought out a peal of laughter.

Days passed, and they saw nothing of the lad.

They concluded, however, that he must be sleeping in Poplar, and that the likeliest place would be one of the big doss-houses near by—a house accommodating about seven hundred men.

Lax knew Thompson, the manager, well, and determined to see what could be done. Taking the photograph, he sought an interview.

'Have you seen this boy in your crowd?' he inquired.

The manager scanned it carefully, but shook his head. He could not remember the face.

'Do you know him?' he asked.

'Yes,' replied Lax.

'Then come at 1.15 in the morning. The men will be mostly in bed by that time, and if he is here you can catch him.'

It was agreed.

At 1.15 a.m. Lax was there. Thompson provided him with an electric torch, and, carrying another, led the way.

The building was of three storeys. They began at the first floor. Every bed was occupied. The occupants were men of all ages and types. Many were criminals hiding from justice. They bore the marks of evil in their faces. Others were of the weak and silly type, backboneless and lazy. Some were more than half imbecile—more sinned against than sinning. They had never had a chance. Once a lad gets mixed up with that crowd it is easy for him to slide down the slippery slope into crime.

There is no collection of humanity in the whole world so tragic and pathetic as that which you see in a London doss-house. The sight of hundreds of men lying on truckle-beds in the semi-darkness—dirty, dishevelled, dour—is like a peep into the inferno. Some were mumbling in their restless sleep, the bed-clothes half flung off the bed. Others snored loudly, and were apparently quite comfortable. A few were awake, and looked up, curious and suspicious, as they passed.

The first floor yielded no success. They then ascended to the second floor, with the same negative result.

Up to the third floor—the cheapest—they climbed. Not all the beds were occupied, and Lax mentally concluded that they would soon get through these.

The electric torches brought out the sad details of each face. With the feeling that nothing would come of it, they passed quickly between the beds. Suddenly Lax came across a youthful face half hidden by the sheet. Upon closer investigation he soon saw it was the boy he wanted. As he looked at him, sound asleep and unconscious of other eyes scrutinizing him, Lax's heart trembled like a violin-string when reaching a top note! It was a poignant moment.

Touching his shoulder, he woke him. In alarm, and half asleep, the boy cried out, 'Oh, father!'

'It isn't your father, Arthur; it's Mr. Lax. Come along; get up.'

Rubbing his eyes, he seemed undecided. The burly figure of Thompson stood over him.

'Come on, sonny, and go with Mr. Lax; this is no place for you,' said the manager.

He rose and dressed. Every man kept his clothes, even his boots, under his pillow. Thieves are plentiful in such places.

In ten minutes they had left the lodging-house and were quickly at the Manse. Lax took care this time to keep his charge under close observation! There must be no bolting on this occasion.

A hot bath, a warm drink, and the boy was soon in bed.

By half-past three the house was quiet. Lax fell asleep with a sense of satisfaction at having found the foolish young prodigal.

At 6.30 he was awakened by hearing the front door slammed violently. Jumping out of bed, he ran to the window, and, behold, there was Arthur walking off unconcernedly!

He was done! Words could not express his disappointment and chagrin.

After breakfast Lax went into his study to attend to some correspondence. He soon found that the young man had been there before him, and £15 in notes and cash was missing!

'The young rascal!' said the minister.

Two more visits to the doss-house proved fruitless. He had found other quarters.

Thompson dilated upon the worthlessness of humanity in general, and of Arthur B—— in particular He wasn't worth troubling about.

Within a week Lax saw him again, and called to him as he crossed the road. He seemed thoroughly broken down. Like the prodigal in the parable, he had spent his all in riotous living, and a famine followed. He had walked the streets three nights.

Without demur he went to the Manse this time, and settled down. The only condition he imposed was that his father should not know where he was.

They had many talks. The veil of the underworld was lifted. London in certain ways is hell. The mere hearing of his story made Lax feel unclean.

They went about together. None of Lax's friends knew the boy's history. Arthur never referred to the

£15. Neither did Lax. Gradually the boy softened.

One night at family prayer the story of the prodigal son was read, according to the set reading for family worship. 'I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned.' At this tears began to fall. 'When his father saw him he had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.'

By this time he was shaken by convulsive sobs. Falling on his knees, he hysterically entreated his father to forgive him. Incoherently he called upon his dead mother. Lax left him alone.

By and by he asked the minister to pray for him. Then a long talk well into the early hours, and it was all right! That night he entered into the new life.

The change was dramatic. It even altered his facial appearance. He was transformed.

Next morning he agreed to a telegram being sent to his father, who came within a few hours. Lax shut them both in his study and left them. In two hours they came out, reconciled and happy. Their eyes were red with weeping, but their faces were lit up with joy

The following day they returned home.

Arthur B—— has not gone back on that midnight decision. He has justified every hope. He is now a preacher of the gospel, a great friend of the fallen, a bearer of others' burdens, and Lax is proud to call him his friend.

Rev. W. H. and Mrs. Lax.

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It was Lax who married him to the splendid girl who is now his wife. A little while ago he also baptized a baby boy—who bears his name. The minister is satisfied!

Two Men—and a Woman

Returning one summer afternoon from the Poplar hospital, where he had been visiting a dying patient, Lax was passing down one of the long, unlovely streets connecting East India Dock Road and Bow Road, that depressing area near the great docks of London. He was sick at heart and mentally weary, for the long vigil and the last farewell had been a great strain. Walking slowly, with eyes downcast and hands behind his back, his brain was obsessed with the problems of life and death.

'Father! Father!' cried a shrill voice, and, turning round, Lax saw a wild-looking, distraught young fellow running towards him. He was hatless and coatless, and the extreme pallor of his face and the dishevelled state of his black hair told that he was labouring under profound emotion.

'Are you a priest, sir?' he exclaimed. 'Are you a priest?' he repeated. And, without waiting for an answer, he went on, 'My sister is dying! Oh, what shall I do?' He clutched Lax's arm and began to pull him towards the house.

'Will you come, sir?' he pleaded, with a piteous, appealing look.

Lax told him he was not a priest, but that if he could do anything he would be glad.

The minister turned to go with him. From his foreign accent it was clear the man was not English. He continued to talk excitedly, and in three minutes they were ascending the steep, narrow stairs to a room on the second floor.

Before entering the sick-chamber he explained, 'My sister is a Catholic; but I am nothing—nothing! I don't believe in religion.' Shrugging his shoulders, and with a dramatic gesture with his right hand, he brushed such things aside.

The room was in front of the house, and just as the dying woman expressed a wish to see a priest he observed Lax passing, and without a word rushed into the street, with such startling effect as just described. He was Anton Dressler, and his sister's name was Marie.

They entered the room. Lying upon an untidy bed was a young woman about thirty years of age. It was plain to see that consumption had claimed another victim. Her cheeks were sunken and her eyes unnaturally bright. A pink glow was upon her face, and a distressing cough made speech difficult. Propped up in bed, her head rolled from side to side, and she kept repeating, 'Jesus, mercy! Jesus, mercy!'

Going to the bedside, Lax held out his hand. She grasped it with both hers, and, with eyes closed, continued to entreat the name of Jesus. He tried to

comfort her by repeating some words of Jesus, passages from the Psalms, and appropriate hymns. Presently she became quiet and appeared stronger.

For a minute or two there was silence. The hot air of the stuffy room seemed heavy, and the distress of the patient suggested that the end was near.

Suddenly she spoke. Looking at her brother, she said, ' Dear Anton, be friends ! '

' No, I will not,' he replied with emphasis. ' If I see him I will kill him—I will hang for him ! ' And he told Lax a tragic story of betrayal and cruel heartlessness by a man to whom his sister was once engaged to be married. With Latin intensity and volubility he went on, vowing vengeance upon the wrongdoer. Apparently it was an old controversy.

' Don't be bitter, dear,' said the sister ; ' we must try to forgive and forget ; I want to see you friends before I die.' At the sound of that last word he broke out in the most unrestrained sobs and wails.

' Where does he live ? ' Lax inquired. They gave an address in Bethnal Green.

' I will fetch him,' he said, and she looked the thanks she could not speak. Clearly a reconciliation between the two men was her dearest wish.

Rushing out of the room, Lax hurried into the street. Hailing a taxi, he urged the driver to make all speed. Obviously the end could not be far off, and his haunting fear was that he might be too late.

Every stop seemed an age. He kept looking at his

watch. His feet drummed upon the floor of the vehicle Never did a journey seem so long!

Arriving at the address, he leapt out of the taxi, telling the driver to wait. Running upstairs, he knocked at the front door on the first floor.

'Come in,' said a gruff voice.

'Are you Louis Krishner?' asked Lax, entering.

'Yes,' was the reply. 'What do you want?'

'Miss Dressler is dying. . . . She wants to see you. . . . Come quick, or you will be too late.' The minister spoke in gasps, for the run upstairs had taken his breath.

Without a movement, Krishner remained where he was, on the tailor's board. A garment was on his knees, and a tape-measure around his neck.

'What does she want to see me for?' he questioned.

'Don't talk, man. . . . Come on! . . . She loves you . . . she wants you! . . . Come, quick,' the other urged.

Throwing the garment aside, he made as though he would get off the board, and then suddenly stopped.

Looking Lax full in the face, he asked, 'Is this a trap? Has her brother sent you?'

'No,' he replied, 'it is not a trap. But come on, man, or you will be too late.'

With deliberation he put on his boots and coat, then sought for his hat; finally looked into the mirror; and then they started to go downstairs.

They got into the taxi, and Lax ordered the man to drive for his life.

For a minute or two there was silence. Each had his own thoughts. Krishner's were partly of fear and partly of chagrin. Then he spoke. It was as though he had arrived at the end of an argument.

'Well, I'm ready for him,' he said.

'What do you mean?' the other asked.

'Why, Dressler has threatened to shoot me the first time he sees me. Two can play that game,' he went on, and, suiting the action to the word, he put his hand into his hip-pocket and brought out a revolver. Fingering it critically, he was soon satisfied that it was ready.

'Look here, give that thing to me,' said the minister, and, reaching out his hand, he grasped the murderous-looking firearm. When Krishner saw Lax's intention he pulled back, and in the miniature tug-of-war the thing fell to the floor of the taxi.

Picking it up, with a grim smile, Krishner expressed satisfaction that it had not gone off. Lax shared that satisfaction!

'I give you my word that no harm shall come to you, but if you keep that revolver I won't answer for what will happen,' said the minister.

Krishner put it back again into his pocket. Lax insisted, however, that he was asking for trouble, and that in the presence of a dying woman the least he could do was to go unarmed and in good faith. After some argument he gave it up, and

with much relief Lax put it into his own hip-pocket.

They were soon at the house. Alighting from the taxi, they began to ascend the stairs.

With a quiet knock, they entered the room. The stillness of death was upon everything. At first it looked as though she was gone. Like a fading lily the woman lay upon the bed. Standing beside her, the very picture of misery, was Anton Dressler. He never raised his eyes from his sister, and seemed oblivious of the presence of others.

Krishner hung back at the door. Lax drew him in, but he made no move towards the bed.

Presently her eyes opened.

'I have brought him,' whispered the minister. 'Speak to him!'

For a minute she gazed upon him who had wronged her so cruelly. Soon tears began to fall, and brother and sister broke into a paroxysm of grief.

'Jesus, mercy!' she groaned.

Then there was silence.

'Anton, speak to Louis,' said Marie. But the brother stood like a statue.

'Louis,' she said, turning to Krishner, 'we are friends, aren't we? Will you be friends with Anton?'

Taking Krishner by the arm, Lax piloted him to the bedside, opposite the brother. They stood facing each other.

'Kiss me, Louis,' she said.

He leaned over and kissed her.

'Shake hands,' she whispered, and, taking her brother's right hand, she put it into Krishner's. They clasped hands without a word.

'Now I'm happy,' she said; and a radiant smile lit up her thin face.

'Pray to Jesus!' This she said with a look of ecstasy in her faded eyes, as she turned to the minister.

Lax quietly lifted up his voice in prayer, commending the stricken woman to God, and entreating the Saviour to destroy hate and malice, and to bring love into the hearts of the two men.

In the midst of the prayer a violent fit of coughing came on. Then followed a dreadful haemorrhage. In ten minutes she was gone.

At this both men burst into hysterical sobs. Their distress was pitiful.

After a time they became quiet again, and the reconciliation was complete.

Four days afterwards three men stood by an open grave in one of East London's great cemeteries—Anton Dressler, Louis Krishner, and Lax There they committed to mother earth all that was mortal of Marie Dressler.

The next day Lax went to the Thames. The tide was running high, blotting out the ugliness and dreariness of the commercialized river. Into it he threw the revolver. Krishner didn't need it, for the friendship reborn at the dying bed of that true woman has persisted to this day.

Chapter XVI

THE POPLAR BOY WHO DIDN'T LET HIM DOWN

Over twenty years ago Lax was seated at the tea-table one afternoon when his telephone bell rang.

'Hello!' said he, as he removed the receiver.

'Are you the Rev. Lax? . . . I am Inspector Jones, of the Poplar police. One of our constables has just brought in a boy caught stealing in Chrisp Street market. He says that you are a friend of his, and will speak for him.'

'What is the boy's name, inspector?' asked Lax.

'He calls himself Jimmy Goodson. Do you wish to have anything to do with him?'

'Yes,' replied Lax, 'I know him. I will be round in a quarter of an hour.'

Within the time stated he found himself entering Poplar police station. Making his way through to a room at the end of a long passage, he found the little miscreant inside an iron enclosure. A burly constable stood near by.

As soon as the boy saw the minister he extended two tremulous hands and burst into bitter tears, crying:

'Mr. Lax! Mr. Lax! Ask them to let me go out;

I won't do it again—I won't do it again! I want to go, Mr. Lax; I want to go!'

'Well, Jimmy, what have you been doing?'

Poor Jimmy continued to cry, and said, with bitter wails, 'I'm very sorry, sir; I really am, sir; I won't do it again!'

Lax turned to the constable, and said:

'If the inspector is in, will you tell him that Mr Lax would like to speak to him?'

In a minute the constable returned, saying, 'The inspector will see you, sir.'

Lax walked into the office, and said, 'I know this boy, inspector, and I would like you to let him go this time. I will undertake to look after him. He is only eleven years of age, and has never had a chance. If you will show mercy to the little fellow, I will see that it never happens again.'

'Very well, Mr. Lax,' replied the inspector, after some conversation, 'I think we can do that, but meantime we had better frighten the little beggar.'

He took up a pair of handcuffs, and together they walked back into the receiving-room.

He shook the handcuffs in front of the lad, and spoke of the pains and penalties that pursued the criminal.

'I won't do it again,' the boy cried eagerly; 'I won't do it again, sir.'

'Now, shake hands with the inspector, Jimmy, and thank him for letting you go,' said the minister.

'Thank you, sir,' said the boy, as he put his grimy little hand into the inspector's. They turned towards the door and quickly passed into the street.

It was a dirty night in November as the two walked towards Chrisp Street. Lax said, 'Now then, Jimmy, remember that I have given my word for you; you mustn't let me down, you know. Remember that somebody is anxious you should go straight.'

'I won't let you down, sir,' he said, and in a confidential whisper he went on:

'Don't tell dad, Mr. Lax—nor mum!'

'That's all right, my lad; nobody shall know,' said his friend. 'God bless you, Jimmy; remember, you and I are pals for ever now!'

'Yes, sir; thank you, sir!' he answered; and away he went toward the hovel he called home.

Lax knew Jimmy's father and mother well. His father was a ne'er-do-weel. He was chronically unemployed. If he had any job, he would call himself a snow-shoveller, but, unfortunately, whenever there was any snow he had lost his shovel! He was a man who drank freely, talked loudly, and believed, as he said, in 'putting his foot down with a firm hand.' He was a despot in the little realm of his home, and his children grew to hate him. There were nine of them, and Jimmy was about the sixth.

After this incident there grew up a strange but beautiful friendship between Jimmy and the minister and his wife. The boy hovered pathetically near their

door day after day. Could he run an errand? Was there anything he could do? On Saturday mornings he would clean boots and make himself useful. Then he would stay to dinner.

On Sundays he went with them to the Mission services. At night he would wait about until his new friends were ready to go home. At the door he gave a cheery 'Good night!' and scampered away like a young hare. He was never so happy as when in their company. Indeed, many people thought that the minister and his wife had adopted him as their son. The fact was, he had adopted them!

The following year, on Young People's Day, Lax invited the boys of the elder classes in the Sunday school to remain behind at the close of the afternoon session. He appealed for loyalty to their great Captain, and told them he was seeking recruits for Christ's service.

After explaining the duties and joys of following Christ, he asked every boy who was prepared to be true to his Captain to stand at the salute. Out of fifty-one boys, forty-seven saluted their unseen Captain! Jimmy was one of them. With a full heart Lax commended the lads to God, and shook hands with them. The episode of that Sunday afternoon coloured Jimmy's life, and changed his whole outlook. There was a gentleness, a grace, and a wistful beauty in his expression.

In the course of the next two or three years a new

world was opened out to Jimmy Goodson. One day he confided to Lax that he wanted to emigrate.

'Where do you want to go, Jimmy?' asked the minister.

'To America, sir,' replied the boy

'Why to America?' was the reply.

'I want to go on a farm,' confided the boy.

'What does your father say?' inquired the minister.

'He says I can go to the devil if I like,' said poor Jimmy.

'And your mother, what does she say?' pursued the questioner.

'She doesn't want me to go; she cried all night when I told her,' said the lad.

'Mr. Lax,' said Jimmy, 'will you see dad, and ask him to let me go?'

There could be no doubt that emigration was the best for Jimmy, therefore Lax went round to talk the matter over with the father and mother. He explained that he was willing to find passage-money and outfit, and would see that he got a good place on the other side.

After some time they agreed, and Jimmy was to seek his fortune in the New World.

The following day Lax went to see Dr. Barnardo.

'Doctor,' said he, 'I have a fine boy who wants to emigrate. He is fifteen. Will you let him go with your next batch of boys if I meet his expenses in every way?'

After some inquiries into his circumstances, the good doctor agreed.

Mrs. Lax then began to prepare Jimmy's outfit. A number of friends subscribed the necessary money for his passage, and some weeks afterwards, with over two hundred other boys, Jimmy stood on the platform of Euston Station, a young emigrant leaving the Old World, the old life, the old sordidness—for the New World of opportunity.

As the train drew out of the station, the boy leaned out of the window. Tears were in his eyes. He took Lax's hand and kissed it affectionately.

With a breaking voice he shouted, as the great train moved on :

'Mr. Lax, I won't let you down! Good-bye, sir. I won't let you——!'

So Jimmy crossed the Atlantic to breathe a new air, to take on new projects, and, as it proved, to achieve new triumphs.

He fell into the hands of a godly farmer, who, after some months, found that this was no ordinary lad. He recommended Jimmy to go in for veterinary study. He did so, working in the summer, and attending classes at a veterinary college in the winter.

His letters to Lax were fragmentary, and did not contain much information. He modestly refrained from writing of his achievements. From time to time, however, news filtered through that he was 'doing well.' What that really meant, nobody knew.

Some years afterwards, Lax found himself in the city of Jimmy's adoption.

He inquired of the manager of the hotel where he stayed if he knew Mr. James Goodson.

'Do you mean Dr. James Goodson?' inquired the manager.

'I don't know that he is a doctor,' replied Lax.

On making further inquiries, it appeared that Dr. James Goodson was none other than Jimmy Goodson! He had displayed brilliant gifts, and had acquired a prominent position as a medical man. Moreover, he was wielding a moral influence in some ways comparable to that of Professor Henry Drummond in Edinburgh some forty years ago. He was the leader of an evangelical movement in the city, and on Sunday evenings preached in a large hall to crowds of undergraduates at the local University.

Lax was his guest during his stay in the city and had the privilege of preaching to his congregation one Sunday evening. That was a delectable fortnight, and both were overjoyed at meeting in such happy circumstances.

Jimmy had married a girl with a medical degree, and she was an earnest follower of Christ. The two were happily mated—it was a marriage made in heaven.

Some time after Lax's return to England he received a letter in which Jimmy intimated that he and his wife

had heard the call of Christ to go as medical missionaries to China. Said he, 'We want to spend our money, to give our strength, and offer our knowledge upon the altar of Christ's service in North China. Will you pray for us?' And so they went, and there they remain.

'Sometimes,' says Lax, 'when I think of those early days of desperate struggle in Poplar, I remember that telephone call, that scene in Poplar police station, that boy whose feet were beginning to tread the criminal way. Now I think of him in a far-off land, giving himself in the service of the lost!'

Chapter XVII

POPLAR WOMEN

Whole chapters could be written about Poplar women. They are the dominating factors in the East End situation. No doubt that would be agreed to by every husband in the land! Probably with truth would it be said. But the Poplar genus of womanhood is undoubtedly unique. Many elements contribute to this state of things. For the most part the mother has to manage the family affairs. Being poor, she is made keen and alert. She must get a shillingsworth for her shilling! Adversity has evolved something of primeval watchfulness over her young, for she is a terror in their defence. Street rows between women are nearly always centred in imaginary wrongs suffered by the children. Then, again, she frequently has to go out to work in order to supplement the earnings of her husband. There is the ever-present anxiety as to ways and means. She is generally far more energetic and capable than the man. Very often there is more character in the woman's little finger than in her husband's whole body.

True, it must be admitted that she has certain handicaps as a housewife. But what can be expected? A girl marries. She was probably born in the narrow

limits of two rooms, or half a house at the most. The orbit of her life up to the time of her marriage has been the cramped region in which she entered the world. She settles down with the most fervent intention to be a good, clean, thrifty wife. Babies begin to arrive. She cannot get away from the one room in which the whole round of family life must be lived She finds it difficult to keep things as they should be. Then, disappointed with herself, she lets things go. Finally, in despair, she gives up attempting to be more than the average, easy-going, slatternly individual dear to the caricaturists of the East End. But, take her all in all, she is a type with immense possibilities of good. In the circumstances, it is a miracle that she succeeds as she does. Lax speedily discovered that the women of Poplar were the strategic centre on which his campaign would have to turn. If he could get the women to his services, the children would quickly be there, and the men would not be far away. His plans, therefore, must be laid with this in mind.

In the early days a Sisterhood was organized. The idea was to transform the scattered units of womanhood into a live, purposeful, comprehensive whole. The first thing, then, must be to impart a spirit of geniality and friendliness. The club idea is somewhere near the ideal. The next step was to infuse the Sisterhood with a passion for the service of others. A high sense of personal obligation was held up before the members. The third achievement was to insist upon the Christian

character of the organization. Friendliness, service, love, were the trinity of virtues by which the Sisterhood was to be animated.

The movement grew gradually. Year after year added to its numbers and influence. It became the most powerful factor in the Mission. Every Monday afternoon now sees the church filled with over a thousand women. The meeting is definitely religious, the hymns are of the Mission type, and the address always aims at the brightening and strengthening of the lives of the women. There is nothing like it in Poplar.

Two or three considerations may be noted here. This meeting is the only religious service most of the women get in the week. In the nature of the case the family absorbs the whole attention of the mother on Sunday. It is the one day of the week when all the family are together, and when meals and relaxation can be enjoyed with leisure. The Monday, therefore, becomes the mother's Sunday. The influence of these thousand women on the home-life of Poplar must be enormous. Again and again may be seen the slow but real development of character. This is evidenced in the general bearing and deportment of the women.

A great institution is the Day Nursery. Over 100 children are generally looked after while their mothers are in the meeting. Milk, toys, and other necessaries are provided ; a brave little army of voluntary nurses

'GENTLE JESUS, MEEK AND MILD'

has been organized, and no praise is too high when the strenuousness of their service is remembered.

What draws such a great crowd of women? Lax is often asked this question. The wonder becomes all the greater when it is remembered that a collection is taken every Monday! The cynical explanation is frequently that they come for the loaves and fishes. It is not true. They get very little, but give a great deal. No, the explanation lies deeper than that. Women have the religious instinct more highly developed than men, and more readily respond to a spiritual or idealistic appeal. Then, again, the 'atmosphere' of the meeting counts for much. It is warm and genial. Fun is not chased away as though it were pestilent. Frequently a ripple of happy, innocent laughter runs round the place. 'The blues' cannot live in such a gracious environment.

And so the women have blessed the Church, and done valiantly to bring it to the high spiritual and moral status it now enjoys. They are in everything. Sewing-meetings on a large scale are held all the year round. They have worked twenty-seven bazaars in twenty-five years. Of late years the net result of each bazaar has been over £600! Out of the poverty of the people—but poverty reinforced by the love of Christ and His Church—such great results have been achieved. No wonder that our Lord made much of womanhood! No wonder that the writers of the gospel narratives give such prominence to the faith, love, and

service of women in the early Church! Without women it is doubtful if the Church could have survived! At any rate, Poplar would have been a poor place without its brave and loyal army of women.

Many stories could be told of the courage, patience, and fortitude of Poplar women. One is given here. Mrs. Barge is the heroine. Her memory is blessed!

Mrs. Barge

'No, sir, I can't say as 'ow I likes 'em; these miserable *seraphims* do make my legs tremble so.'

The speaker was Mrs. Barge. She was registering her protest against the latest exploit of hostile aircraft dropping bombs on open towns. She had a turn for quaint and vigorous expression. True, most of these freaks of phrase were the result of a strange proneness for putting the cart before the horse. It was she who, in her class-meeting testimony, thanked the Lord she was not running with 'the *muddy guiltitude.*'

It will be seen that Mrs. Barge was a character. She was unique. Wherever she was, her personality projected itself and touched everybody at some point. Her chief quality, however, was her friendliness. She exhaled the spirit of good-fellowship as a flower gives off its fragrance. Her soul expanded in the company of her kind.

Now, of all qualities in the human personality that make for blessedness in the East End of London this

is the one—friendliness. For the East End is a desert place ; and friendliness is the God-given magician that makes ' the desert to rejoice and blossom as the rose.' So Mrs. Barge was a genial sun, radiating warmth and cheer ; the sphere in which she reigned was her home, her church, and the squalid street in which she lived.

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Mrs. Barge was a widow. Among the very poor this word is synonymous with misery of a poignant kind. It means loneliness and helplessness. Only few successfully stem the tide that carries widows to misery and gloom. Mrs. Barge was one of these. Many sorrows had chastened her spirit, and the bitter fight had well nigh broken a body that was all too frail. But her optimism was invincible. She was ' Mrs. Hopeful ' in the Christian pilgrimage. She never failed to cheer the despondent. Her favourite text was : ' My grace is sufficient for THEE ! ' ' I allus puts THEE in big letters, sir, because it means ME ! '

She married when she was nineteen years of age. Never did two mortals set out on a more eventful voyage on the sea of matrimony than Mr. and Mrs. Barge. Her husband was a cats'-meat man. All the tabbies of the district knew his step and call. They rubbed their arched backs against his grubby legs and purred in friendly salutation as he handed the skewered dainties to the womenfolk on his rounds.

Barge had a weakness for high-sounding names.

The fact was, he was a bit of an aristocrat. He claimed to trace his ancestry back to the old nobility. If he had his rights he would be wearing his heraldic crest, enjoying his lordly estate, and riding in his Rolls-Royce car! But the honest never did get their deserts! For hours he would dilate on his favourite theme until he really believed every word to be true. So, unconsciously he began to cultivate the grand manner—a swagger in his walk, a high inflexion in his voice, and a saucy curl in his sandy hair. He was always called *Mr.* Barge. Poor Mrs. Barge was the patient audience for his historical essays, as well as for his bitterness of spirit.

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By and by babies began to arrive. Mr. Barge's weakness for grandiloquence found its sequel in the names of his offspring. The first child was a boy, and he bore the name of Julius Caesar. Poor thing! Whether or not he found the name too crushing is not known, but he soon wearied of life and slipped away. The next also was a boy. He received the name of Constantine Paul. He survives; but a busy world does not get beyond 'Con.' Con was in the Army, and has a proud place on our Roll of Honour. Then twins came—and went. After a while another boy was born, to the delight of his parents, and he was named Jus.

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One day, as Mr. Barge was pursuing his calling, he slipped on the pavement, and the laden basket he carried caused him to fall heavily. He walked home painfully, but appeared to get the better of his accident. Some months afterwards, however, he collapsed in the street, and had to be carried home. Paralysis followed. Then for three weary years Mrs. Barge bore the burden of the family unaided. Nursing a sick, querulous husband, besides carrying on the cats'-meat business, nearly broke her. Through it all she faced the world with rare philosophy and gaiety of spirit. She carried a radiant heart through the darkest day. Then Mr. Barge left an inhospitable world. He was buried in the East London Cemetery, and, in keeping with his experience in life (for he always shared a house with other tenants), he lies in a grave with several others whom he never knew while living. Mrs. Barge followed the line of least resistance (the line usually followed by widows in our part), and she became a charwoman.

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Then came the war. At first it was a shock, then a long-drawn agony. Con was fired by a fine desire to join the forces in the early days of hostilities, and within three months of being eighteen years old had put on khaki. Jus was all that was left to Mrs. Barge. She simply lived for him. They lived in two rooms in a mean street of squalid-looking cottages.

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The war added to the miseries of life in the East End. For one reason, an unusually large proportion of the men had gone, and the casualties were terrible. Every street had its war shrine and its Roll of Honour.

But another misery came to the district. On mischief bent, enemy aircraft followed the gleaming waters of the Thames, and never a visitation to the Metropolis but Zeppelins, Taubes, or Gothas hovered like devouring hawks above the humble roofs. Fear of these horrid visitants accounted for the nightly thronging of dug-outs, tunnels, basements—indeed, anywhere out of danger—by thousands of terrified women pushing rickety prams containing children, blankets, pillows, and food, and strong men carrying sick and infirm folk. Such sights burnt themselves into the memory.

This story is concerned with one of these diabolical visitations—a visitation that left a deep mark on the soul of Poplar. And incidentally it discovered a heroine.

It was on a Wednesday, just before noon. Children were at school, mothers shopping or preparing the midday meal, and the great tide of Poplar life at its utmost roar. Mrs. Barge was bending over the washtub hard at her daily task. Overhead she heard the familiar drone of an aeroplane engine. Drawn by curiosity, she went to the front door to see the sight. No sooner had she opened the door than she saw the livid features of her neighbour opposite, who, with wild

cries and gesticulations, besought Mrs. Barge to go back, shouting, ' They're over yer 'ead ! '

' Take cover ! ' shouted the policeman, as he cycled past as fast as wheels would carry him. At that moment Mrs. Barge looked up and saw six or eight great Gothas slowly, almost insultingly, moving in battle array at a low altitude. The dread alternating hum of the powerful engines filled the air with cruel menace, and made the blood freeze in one's veins.

Then came the first muffled ' boom ' of an exploding bomb. Soon another fell with a devastating crash, accompanied by the screams of some distraught woman. At this point Mrs. Barge peeped through the slightly-opened door.

' Oh, my Gawd ! ' she exclaimed at what she saw, for there in the street ran a half-demented woman carrying a baby.

' Swish ! Crash ! Boom ! '—with the shattering of glass and the tearing of timber. Doors were torn to ribbons, window-frames burst and broken, ceilings fell with sizzling, crackling sound, dust showered in choking clouds, and the end of all things seemed at hand.

Out ran Mrs. Barge, for the woman carrying the baby had fallen. The infant was flung out of her arms and lay motionless on the ground. She must help them ! What would the poor thing do ? Reaching the woman, she found she was dying. Ghastly wounds bled terribly. She could not last long. The baby was already dead.

'Come on, my dear, I'll carry yer in,' said Mrs. Barge, and, stooping over the unconscious woman, she began to lift her. Then something happened too dreadful for words. An aerial torpedo fell within a few feet of the two women. The ground shook beneath them, and the reverberating crash is vividly remembered to this day.

Within a few minutes ambulance workers gathered the wounded. Mrs. Barge was just alive. Tenderly she was taken to the hospital.

Lax arrived at the scene of the tragedy as they were conveying the injured away. Within an hour he was at the bedside of the dying heroine. She had recovered consciousness.

'Read to me, sir,' she gasped. '"He shall give His angels charge over THEE" ('that means ME,' she said): "to keep THEE in all thy ways."

'It's all right, sir,' she said; 'He knows all about it; I shall soon be in glory.

'Give me the bread and wine; I want to feed upon Him.' And so the Communion was administered, while life ebbed away. She prayed for her murderers, like her blessed Saviour—'They know not what they do,' she said.

Then, with ineffable sweetness, she smiled upon those near her.

'O Lamb of God, I come!'—and away she went to the Land of Light and Love.

Chapter XVIII

ANOTHER POPLAR WOMAN—AND KITTY

Mrs. Briggs was one of Lax's friends, and she lived at No. 4. The small, unlovely street was at the 'back o' beyond' of everywhere, not far from the great avenue of trade leading to the City, that mysterious centre around which clings the whole British Empire. From the street you could see the tall masts of ships in the docks—ships unloading their precious freights from the ends of the earth. These docks give to Poplar its spirit of romance. Poplar is verily the hub of the world. The great London river laves its shores and whispers its news from everywhere. But there is more than romance. In these back streets, which make up a wilderness of bricks and mortar, there is tragedy unrelieved. Yet even there you find hardy, buoyant souls who bravely 'breast the blows of circumstance,' and give dignity to sordid things.

They say that human beings have an aura—a distinctive radiance exuding from the soul. If that is so, there can be no doubt that it also applies to homes. There is such a thing as the aura of the home. To the seeing eye, the soul of the home is laid bare. It has a face. It declares its character to every passer-by. Some are red and riotous, others are green and vigorous, while still more are blue—benign and blessed.

Whoever knew Mrs. Briggs would have recognized the aura writ large on No. 4. It was clean, radiant, smiling. The doorstep forbade its whiteness being soiled. The little brass knocker hung brightly silhouetted against the background of a dingy door, where vigorous efforts to clean the metal round the keyhole had spread a halo far into the decayed paint. The curtains, too, proclaimed themselves part of Mrs. Briggs. True there were holes, but an honest attempt to darn had been made, and the small scars bore themselves proudly.

Mrs. Briggs awoke to a dull, hot morning. It was one of a succession of suffocating days. The sun was sullen and hung in a heavy mist. She had slept little, and her nerves felt ragged and torn. She looked round the small bedroom. So diminutive was it that the simple prints on the walls seemed to press themselves upon her. The ceiling was low. The loud pattern on the faded wallpaper proclaimed its presence in strident tones.

No wonder she had not slept. It would have been a miracle if she had. The room was close and stuffy. If the window was kept open, the street smells—all the worse since so many sweepers had joined the colours—and the noisome odours from the numerous factories filled the room. The continuous noise outside, the ceaseless crying of somebody's baby near by, the jolting of heavy wagons and lorries, the perpetual racket of machinery—all these effectually scared away the angel of sleep.

But Mrs. Briggs was of a practical turn of mind. She had a philosophy of life born of adversity: 'If you cannot bring things to your mind, then bring your mind to the things.'

'That's what I sez, sir,' she explained. 'Some folks is for ever complainin', but that don't improve things. There ain't no good in worryin'!'

Besides all this she was one of God's elect. In ugly surroundings she lived a lovely life. 'Faith and prayer, sir, these things works miracles. Look at me,' said she; 'my husband's bin in the hospital fifteen months with those poor smashed legs' (for the good man, a dock labourer, had been terribly injured in unloading a great ship). 'Then the childer allus ailin'—five of em' livin'—especially Kitty, who seems to be fadin' away, and Tommy at the Front. What should I do without faith and prayer?'

Yes, what would she have done? A clue to her good cheer confronted every visitor to that simple house, in the shape of a text-card hung over the mantel:

KEEP SMILING!
GOD LIVES!

Little Kitty looked worse than usual. She was six years old, but so small and frail. Mrs. Briggs made up her mind what she would do. After breakfast, when

the other children had been sent off to school, she would take Kitty to the great London Hospital in the Whitechapel Road, that beneficent institution in the midst of East London's two million toilers.

She trudged along the Commercial Road, pushing the dilapidated pram. How hot it was! Now and again she had to stop to take her breath. At last she got to the entrance, and soon found herself in the waiting-room. She was one of hundreds. The halt and the lame craved succour for their manifold ills. Her heart almost failed her as she saw the crowds—some rough and aggressive, others shy and timorous—but love of Kitty kept her up.

The out-patients' department of a great hospital wears the appearance of perpetual motion. Nurses in their stiff print dresses appear to try the impossible feat of being in two places at one time. Medical students in their white coats move smoothly about here and there. But with all the animation there is perfect order.

On this occasion there were about a dozen soldiers—R.A.M.C. men—assisting the nurses. Their shoulder-straps proclaimed them Canadians. In a few days they would be going to the Front, and this was their final training before disappearing 'somewhere in France.'

'I'll try and get us a cup o' tea, dearie,' said Mrs. Briggs to Kitty, for both were weary with the long, hot journey through the crowded streets. A buffet was at the corner of the great room, where tea and coffee

could be got for a penny a cup. So they stood in the queue waiting their turn for the cheering beverage.

'Hello, ma, waiting for a cup of tea?' asked one of the R.A.M.C. men.

'Yes,' replied Mrs. Briggs; 'I'm very nearly parched, and I'm so tired.'

'Cheerio!' cried the soldier. 'I'll get you a cup in a jiffy.'

Soon he reappeared with the tea, and invited them both to a seat at a long table.

'What's that you've got?' he asked, pointing to the White Ribbon badge of the British Women that Mrs. Briggs was wearing.

'Why, it means that I'm a British Woman,' she replied, looking down proudly at the white enamel brooch.

'Well, I didn't suppose you were a blooming German woman,' he rejoined. 'What does it mean? Does it mean that you are loyal to King and Empire?'

'Yes,' she assented, 'but it also means that I don't drink beer, and that I try to live a good life.'

'Oh, you are one of the goody-goody sort, then?' he chaffed.

'I don't know about that, but I hope it means that I don't do nothin' to disgrace my religion,' she replied.

'Do you believe in prayer, ma?' asked the man.

'Wot! I should think I do; I don't know how I'd ha' done without it in my troubles,' she declared.

She gave him some little idea of the sorrows that pressed so heavily upon her.

'But don't *you* believe in prayer?' she asked the man.

'No, I've dropped all that long since,' he replied, with a sad smile.

'I say, does your little lassie pray?' he asked, and, turning to Kitty standing near, he took her hand.

'Yes,' replied Mrs. Briggs, 'she sez her prayers night and mornin'; don't you, dearie?'

'Well,' said he, 'one of my pals has been badly wounded at the Front, and we are afraid he is dying. He's wandering in his mind, and is always talking about his little girl, Maisie. He says if he could only hear her say her prayers like she used to do at home, he would be happy. If your little lassie would say her prayers for him perhaps he would feel better.'

'Will you go, dearie?' asked the mother. Kitty shyly said she would.

'Wait a minute,' suggested the soldier; 'I'll go and ask Sister if it will be all right.'

He hurried to the ward in which the wounded man lay, and soon returned with the Sister's permission.

Along the corridor they sped, up three flights of stairs, leading Kitty upon her errand of prayer and pity. Quietly opening the door of the ward, the soldier led them almost on tiptoe, between the long rows of beds. Kitty, open-eyed and wondering, gazed upon the strange sight of so many still figures lying beneath the white counterpanes. They were soldiers broken in the war.

At one bed they stopped. A nurse was speaking soothing words to the patient, and gently restraining his efforts to rise. In his delirium he was calling for loved ones across the dividing sea—loved ones in a little homestead on the great plains of the Dominion of Canada. He had heard of the peril of the Motherland, and, with thousands of others, had gladly responded to the call for help. With a heartache too deep for words, he had said 'Good-bye!' to his wife and two little girlies, and then joined the Standard of the King. Here he was, bruised and broken, crying to the loved ones who could not hear.

'This is the little lassie who is going to say her prayers, nurse,' explained the R.A.M.C. man.

Encouraged by her mother, Kitty knelt by the bed, and began the prayer that millions of other children have prayed—the prayer that has brought heaven down to earth:

Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,
Look upon a little child;
Pity my simplicity,
Suffer me to come to Thee.

Fain I would to Thee be brought;
Gracious God, forbid it not;
In the kingdom of Thy grace
Give a little child a place.

'God bless father! God bless mother! God bless sisters and brothers—especially Tommy, who is fighting

in the war. And God bless all our wounded soldiers, and please, God, soon make them well. Amen.'

Hearing the child's voice, the patient lay still, and his delirium ceased. He turned his head in the direction of the voice, and put out a thin, white hand, which played upon the little one's face. Running his fingers through the plentiful light hair, the sick man feebly whispered, ' Why, it's Maisie, my little Maisie, saying her prayers for daddy ! Maisie, daddy's little precious ! '

By this time other soldiers who were able to walk had come to the bedside, and many faces were wet with tears as the dying soldier talked to his little child in the far-away land.

' Say your prayers again, dear,' whispered the nurse, for the patient was quieter than he had been all day. So everyone reverently knelt round the bed, and Kitty said her little prayer once more. Surely it was a time of worship, and a little child had led them to God.

Leaving the ward, the three made their way back to the out-patients' department, each conscious of a strange thrill. They had been on holy ground, and had been participants in a very sacrament of God.

Somewhat confusedly the soldier said ' Good-bye ! to Mrs. Briggs, as they re-entered the great room. In a short time she and Kitty were seated at the long table again, their eyes turned towards the place where the doctors were seeing the patients, and wondering when their turn would come.

'Our soldier's coming back, mum!' cried Kitty, as she caught sight of the R.A.M.C. man striding quickly towards them.

'I say, ma,' he said, taking his seat by Mrs. Briggs's side, 'I'm terribly miserable!—what shall I do?'

Looking at him, she saw signs of evident distress, for his eyes were wet with the tears he vainly strove to keep back.

'I wish the lassie would pray for me too!' he sobbed.

'Yes, that she shall,' said Mrs. Briggs; and in a minute Kitty was kneeling at her mother's knee, with clasped hands and closed eyes, softly saying her little prayer. Then Mrs. Briggs, seated where she was, quietly added *her* prayer. She was in her element. Her face was radiant.

The prayer over, in homely, motherly fashion, she led him along the winding paths of repentance and faith, until at last they gained the bright heights of assurance.

'Lord, I believe,' said the penitent.

'Good-bye, ma! and God bless you!' cried the soldier, as he heartily shook Mrs. Briggs's hand.

'Won't my mother be glad when I write to tell her the news!'

Turning to Kitty, he said, 'Lassie, your prayer did it!' And with that he stooped until his big brown face touched Kitty's white cheek in a resounding kiss.

Chapter XIX

HUMAN SALVAGE IN POPLAR

The Parson and the Burglars

Some years ago Lax received an urgent message asking him to visit a woman who was dying in a street near the mission. He hastened upon his melancholy errand to No. 15. It was explained that the room was on the second floor. Moreover, he was to walk straight in, as the unfortunate woman had nobody to nurse her, except certain kindly neighbours who looked in now and again.

He reached the house named, and began to ascend the dark stairs. On the second floor he looked for the room on the right. Knocking quietly, he turned the handle of the door and walked in.

No sooner had he entered the room than two men rushed towards him. One banged the door fiercely, and locked it. The other took him by the throat, pushed him against the wall, and pointed a wicked-looking revolver at his head!

'Who's sent yer here, yer blasted spy?' he exclaimed. 'Speak, or I'll blow yer bloody brains out!'

Lax found it difficult to say a word. The man had gripped his throat so effectually that conversation, to say the least, was not easy.

With a struggle he wrenched himself free, took the hand that held the revolver, and turned its direction to a less dangerous angle.

'Who's giv' us away?' the man whispered with a hiss.

By this time the other fellow came near, and suggested that the parson was only a plant: the police knew something about this.

Lax kept cool. He knew that he was in the hands of desperadoes, and that he had better follow the scriptural injunction, and 'make friends of the mammon of unrighteousness!'

'Nobody has sent me here,' he said. 'As a matter of fact I came in answer to a message, to see Mrs. Garnet, on this floor, who I hear is dying. By mistake I turned in at this door.'

'On second thoughts,' he continued, putting the man's hand away from his throat, 'I do believe I was sent here!'

'Who's sent you, then?' shouted the man, taking a firmer grip of the minister's neck.

Only a gurgle could escape Lax's throat, and the revolver was again uncomfortably near his face.

At that moment the other man came to the rescue, for he saw the stupidity of asking a man questions when your hand firmly gripped his larynx!

'Let him talk, yer bloody idiot!' he said. His language was not choice, but his logic was perfect!

'How can he speak with yer hand on his throat?' he went on.

Seeing the reasonableness of this procedure, the other eased the pressure on the organ of speech, and waited for a reply.

'Now we shall get on better, I think,' said Lax, coolly clearing his throat, 'but, if you will take that revolver away, I think we shall get on better still.

'I was going to say, when you stopped me, that I believed someone had sent me—I believe God has sent me!' said he.

The men uttered no sound as they heard this.

He stepped away from them with his back to the fireplace.

'Now, what's all this about?' he asked, looking straight at them.

He looked round the room. There could be no doubt that these men were burglars. On the table and dresser were the evidences of their last night's work. Silver of various kinds, watches, bangles, and other trinkets lay about. The papers were full of a big haul from a Strand jeweller's shop. He concluded that here were the thieves.

The men were wild-eyed and tired-looking, neither elegant in appearance nor strong in physique. Indeed, they were pitiable specimens of humanity.

'Ah,' said Lax, looking round, 'I think I can guess what you've been up to.'

'Who's giv' us away, guv'nor?' asked the second man, with apprehension.

'Nobody,' was the reply. 'I will give you my

word of honour that I didn't know you until I came into this place.'

They were suspicious, and looked afraid. The first man began to play with the revolver again.

'I won't talk to you unless you put that thing away!' declared the minister.

The ugly weapon was then put on the mantel, and, pulling a chair from under the table, Lax sat down and began to talk.

He quickly gathered from the casual remarks they made that the articles scattered around were the result of their latest crime. It was soon to go to a receiver, and they would get very little for the risks they had run in perpetrating the burglary.

'You can be quite easy in your mind,' he said; 'I am not going to give you away. This is your concern. My business is to get you to see the folly of this sort of thing, and to give it up. In the long run the police will be sure to get you, and, whatever happens, you can have no satisfaction in it.'

The kettle was on the fire. By this time the water began to boil. There was something incongruous in the homely singing and bubbling that were going on beneath that lid, while the sordid drama was being unfolded in the room. The kettle cried aloud to be taken from the fire; it seemed to want to speak. Indeed, it was a providential incident, for it gave an innocent interlude to a situation that might easily have developed into tragedy.

Lax lifted the kettle and put it inside the fender. He suggested that apparently they were going to have tea, and, if they had no objection, he would join them!

That small act transformed the whole position. They were more at ease, and began to prepare the meal. Three cups were brought out, three herrings were cooked on a shovel over the fire, and they sat down to tea!

They talked on for quite two hours. The men had 'done time,' and were familiar with the inside of several prisons. They were bitter with their fate. Superstitiously they imagined that God Himself was against them. They were thieves because nobody cared whether they were honest or not! They hadn't had a fair chance! Honesty was impossible for them! And so on.

Lax met their objections, and offered his services, if in any way he could help them.

'Well, now, I've done!' he said at last. 'You need not worry about anything I am going to do; but, take my advice: quit this kind of thing, it's wrong: it won't pay: have done with it.' He offered his hand. They took it—and he was gone.

Towards the end of the conversation they had become quite friendly, and chatted as though they were all three conspirators!

Three days later Lax called again, but the birds had flown. He had no idea where they had gone.

About two years afterwards he was going to the City

on the top of a bus. At the end of Commercial Road a man jumped on and climbed to the top. A tap on the shoulder caused Lax to turn round.

'Do you remember me, sir?' said the man, with a smile. Lax hesitated.

Suddenly it dawned upon him.

'Oh, yes!' said he. 'I should think I do remember you! Give me your hand.'

'I've not got a shooter this time, sir,' said he, with a knowing wink.

'I'm glad to hear that,' said the minister, smiling.

'How are you getting on?—and how is your mate?' Lax went on.

'Oh, all right,' he replied. 'We are living honest now.' They talked of many things.

'I say, sir,' he went on, 'will you do me a bit of a favour?'

'What is it?' asked Lax.

'I want to get married!' he replied. 'When you saw us, I was livin' with a girl who wasn't my wife; she didn't like it, and didn't like the way I was goin' on, neither.' Then he stopped, as though there was a difficulty.

'The fact is,' he continued, 'she's now—— You understand, sir? . . . And I'd like to be married pretty quick: will you do the job for us?'

Of course, Lax said he would be delighted, and made an appointment for him to come to his house for tea—as he said, to return the man's hospitality!

He came. A special licence was obtained, and in a few days the marriage ceremony took place at the mission.

For some years this man attended the Sunday evening service. Unfortunately he was killed in a street accident while trying to save his dog from being run over by a tramcar.

His widow entreated Lax to perform the last rites over his poor mangled body. This he did.

'You know, sir,' she said, 'he died a christian. He was rough, but he was never the same again after the day you talked to him and his brother, and had that herring with them.'

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Here follows a story with a sad and disappointing conclusion.

Don't Forget My Kiddie!

A new face in a congregation, especially when seen in the same place Sunday after Sunday, is always interesting to a minister. Lax saw one such man who regularly occupied the same pew in the gallery on the right hand of the pulpit. At the close of the service Lax would nod to the man as he came down the pulpit steps. In this way a slight touch of friendliness sprang up between them.

In a little while the man brought his wife and three children, who filled a pew. The next step lay with the

new-comer, for he began to wait at the vestry door for a word as the minister left to go home

'Will you come to my place next Saturday afternoon, sir?' he asked one night. 'I live in Cottage Street, and I want to have a talk with you.'

'Certainly,' replied Lax; and the following Saturday found him there.

When he entered he saw that tea was prepared, and they were soon chatting over the meal.

'You know, sir,' said the man, 'I've been what you call "converted." It was some Sundays since, while you were preaching. I've given up drinking and gambling—and smoking too. Everything is different.'

'Well done!' exclaimed the minister. 'Thank God for that!'

'You see this furniture,' went on the new friend; 'I've bought it and paid for it, and we're so happy we don't know what to do with ourselves.'

'Splendid! splendid!' said Lax. 'I am pleased.'

One admirable evidence of the reality of his conversion was the change in his attitude towards his children. He loved them passionately. Every penny he could spare was spent on their clothing and their pleasure. It was plain to see, too, that they were happy in that love.

Before leaving, the minister read a portion of scripture and offered prayer. There was a holy stillness. Never before had the voice of prayer risen in that house.

This went on for some months. The whole family were constantly in their pew on Sunday evenings. They always looked for the friendly nod from the minister as he descended the pulpit steps.

Suddenly Lax missed them. He went round to the house. Other tenants were in, and they knew nothing of the man or his family. This was a sad disappointment, for up to this time it had seemed such a hopeful case.

About a year afterwards, Lax was seated in a bus. The long-lost man got on, but, as soon as he saw the minister, promptly jumped off! This was incomprehensible. Lax could suggest no reason for such a sudden and unexpected turn of events.

Some months afterwards, very late at night, Lax was going to bed. When he had got half-way upstairs, there was a knock at the front door. It proved to be the man from Cottage Street.

'I must see you, Mr. Lax,' said he. 'Can you spare me a few minutes?'

He apologized for coming so late, and was evidently in deep distress. He wanted to explain matters.

'You see,' he said, 'I owed money to a man, and when he knew I was converted he demanded payment of the debt. I let him take the new furniture I had bought. Then we had to clear out and walk the streets.'

'But why didn't you come and tell me?' said Lax 'I could have helped you.'

'I didn't like to sponge on you, sir,' he replied 'I

would rather eat dust than let you think I wanted anything from you.

'Worst of all, I'm sorry to confess that I've been drinking again, sir,' he continued. 'It was too much for me; it looked as though God didn't care whether I lived straight or not.' He tried to keep from tears. He was a pitiable object as he sat there, trying to swallow his sobs.

After a little while he went on again.

'My wife is dead; it killed her,' he moaned. 'Then one of the children died.'

At this he utterly broke down. It was a heart-breaking scene.

'Well,' said the minister, 'how can I help you?'

'Oh, I don't know,' he replied, drying his tears. 'But if you will keep an eye on my youngest kiddie I shall be thankful.'

'What is her age?' asked Lax.

'She's ten years old,' he explained. 'The other girl is in service, and is all right.'

'I'll do that with pleasure,' said Lax; 'but what about yourself?'

'Oh, don't trouble about me,' he replied, trying bravely to keep up. 'I shall be going away.'

Lax gave him ten shillings, and told him to get something to eat and a good night's rest, and he would feel better. If he were in trouble again, he must make straight for the minister.

Lax saw the poor fellow to the gate. It was nearly

one o'clock in the morning. The darkness soon swallowed him up.

Four days afterwards a police constable called on the minister.

'You are wanted at an inquest,' said the constable. 'The body of a man has been found in the river. We could find nothing that would lead to identification, except this scrap of paper.'

The officer took it out of his pocket-book, and both men scanned it sadly. It simply read, 'Please ask Rev. Lax not to forget my kiddie.'

There was no sleep in the Manse that night. Here were all the elements of Greek tragedy.

Lax went to the mortuary and identified the body of the poor fellow, who had jumped into the river and ended his life in despair.

A simple funeral, with the two children and Lax as the only mourners, brought the terrible story to an end.

Lax didn't forget that kiddie. He placed her with a kind, motherly woman, who took care of her.

After awhile she went out to domestic service, and has done well.

John Nobody

Late one night Lax and his wife were at supper when they were startled by five resounding knocks on the door. They thought that, as usual, the incorrigible urchins of Poplar were having their joke. The minister got up to expostulate with them. To his surprise,

when he opened the door, he found, not mischievous boys, but an old and decrepit man leaning heavily against the doorpost, his long white beard and tangled hair dirty and unkempt. His face was filthy, his breath foul, and his whole attitude that of a man in the last stages of destitution.

As soon as the door was opened, he looked up and blinked at the minister, holding as tightly as he could to the doorpost for safety. He spoke with a Scotch accent.

'I am verra sorry, sir, verra sorry, sir, but I'm abominably drunk ; will ye give me a tanner for a doss ? '

Lax looked at the old man, and did not speak for a moment. The old fellow evidently thought that this silence meant that he would get no money, and he pursued his plea :

' For the love o' God, sir, give me sixpence. The night is cold, and I have no bed ; for the love o' God, just sixpence.'

Lax has made a rule never to turn old people, either men or women, from his door on winter nights, and, without rebuke, put his hand into his pocket. ' Here you are, go and get a bed.'

' Thank ye, sir,' he said, ' thank ye.'

He shuffled from the door into the street. Lax watched his bent figure until he reached an electric arc-lamp. There the old man opened his hand, looked at the coin, spat on it for luck, and pursued his way to the doss-house.

Three nights later, about the same time, nearly midnight, five knocks were heard again. Lax once more found the old man at the door.

'I am sorry, sir,' he said, 'I'm abominably drunk, and have nowhere to sleep. Will ye give me a tanner—just one tanner?'

'Now, why are you so foolish?' asked Lax.

'Give me a tanner, sir,' he pleaded several times.

Once again the minister put his hand into his pocket and gave him the coin. Again the man shuffled into the road, again he spat on the money under that arc-lamp. Then he was lost in the enveloping darkness.

During that winter the mysterious visitor came to Lax's house on the average twice a week. Nearly always he confessed to being abominably drunk. On several occasions, in very bad weather, he was taken in to have a cup of coffee. He could never be got beyond the entrance hall. As he sat on the chair, the embodiment of frailty, physically and morally, he was a pitiable object indeed.

One night Lax said, 'Now, you and I are friends by this time, but you have never told me your name.'

'Name? I have no name, sir,' said the old man.

'Don't tell me that tale,' said the minister.

'Well,' he said, 'I have a name: it is John Nobody.'

'Don't you put me off with that story,' said Lax, with a smile.

'Yes, sir, it's true,' said he, 'that's my name.'

'Well, John,' said the minister, 'whatever your name may be, I'm sorry to see you in this plight; why don't you give up the drink?'

'Please, sir, will ye give me a tanner?' he said.

He was given his sixpence, and away he went.

He ceased coming in the summer, and it was surmised that he had gone into the country, tramping and begging.

When November came, the five knocks were heard again, and through the winter the old incidents were repeated. Suddenly his visits stopped.

Lax missed him and worried about him, for there had been a decided improvement in his appearance and in his language. It was thought that he might have met with a street accident, and it was feared he would not be seen again.

One day, however, Lax received a telephone message from the local infirmary, saying that a patient wished to see him.

As this was not an uncommon occurrence, he was in no way surprised. In the course of a few minutes he found himself at the infirmary office, asking for the whereabouts of the patient who wished to see the minister.

Receiving the information, he made his way along the corridor, and soon arrived at the ward indicated.

'Oh, Mr. Lax,' said the Sister, 'it is an old man who has been talking about you for days. He was brought in after an accident. He cannot live long,

and we thought that really we ought to trouble you to come and see him.'

Lax followed the Sister down the ward.

She quietly stopped by the side of a screen around one of the beds. At once the minister recognized his old friend, John Nobody.

'Hullo, John,' said he, 'I'm sorry to find you here; I wondered where you were; I've been worrying about you.'

'Thank ye, sir,' replied he, very feebly; 'it's verra kind o' ye to come; I wanted to speak to ye before I die.'

'Oh, don't talk about dying, John,' said the minister.

'I'm dying, sir, sure enough,' he said. 'There's no hope. The machinery has broken down and the engine is busted. I shall soon be gone.'

'Well, John, and what about it?' asked Lax.

'It's all right, sir; it's all right, sir,' he repeated, with a smile. '"I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned."'

'Have you said that, John?' asked Lax.

'Yes, sir,' was the faint reply.

'And what did the Father do, John?' asked the minister.

'"He had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him,"' said John.

'Has the Father done that for you, John?' inquired the minister.

'Yes, sir,' was the smiling reply.

'I am truly glad to hear it, John,' said Lax.

'Yes, sir, it's all right—it's all right,' he repeated. '"He had compassion—He had compassion, and fell on his neck, and kissed him."' Tears rained down the withered old face.

After some silence he murmured:

'You asked my name, sir, and I said it was John Nobody.'

'Yes,' answered Lax.

'Well, sir,' he continued, 'that is not my name; my name is Peter Carmichael. My father was a minister. I was a student in a Presbyterian college, training for the ministry.'

There was silence again. Memory was at work.

'I discredited my father's name, and brought shame upon my Church. I've been a wanderer on the face of the earth, until I came to London four years ago.' He rested again.

'My wife died twenty years ago,' he went on, 'and since then I've had no friend, sir, until I knew you. You've been like my son, sir.' He reached out his poor old hand, and took Lax's in his.

'God bless ye, sir,' he said, 'and reward ye richly.'

'Will ye do me a kindness, sir?' he asked.

'Yes, John, I will,' said Lax. 'What can I do?'

'Will ye give me a kiss, sir?' asked the dying man. 'No one has kissed me since my wife died.'

The minister stooped down, and kissed the old man.

'Thank ye, sir,' he said, 'thank ye. Ye've been my friend, sir; ye've been my helper too, and ye've never preached at me, sir.'

'Don't mention it, John,' said Lax, deeply moved. 'God be praised that you have come back to Him.'

'When I get to the other side, I shall tell them that I found God's friend, who was my friend in Poplar,' said John. His breath was fast failing him.

'Now, sir, will ye pray with me?' he asked.

Lax prayed, commending him to the tender care of the Father of the prodigals. Reaching out his hand when the prayer was concluded, he said 'Give me your blessing, sir.'

Lax raised his hand in blessing, and said: 'The Lord bless thee and keep thee; the Lord make His face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee; the Lord lift up the light of His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.'

'Amen!' said Peter Carmichael.

He then lay down quietly. He was exhausted with the effort of speech, and, closing his eyes, he seemed to shrink.

In less than an hour, with a strange appearance of decisiveness, his spirit ascended to God.

As Lax looked upon that old, frail, battered body, he had a strange sense of elation. He felt sure that somewhere not far from the Throne of God his strange old friend, John Nobody, had at last found himself at home.

Chapter XX

POPLAR—CHINATOWN

Like the Briton, the Chinese is found nearly everywhere. Like him, the Chinaman makes himself at home abroad, and looks forward, after making his pile, to returning to his native land and spending the remainder of his days in ease and comfort.

The Chinese colony is quite a separate section of Oriental life in London. It is within five minutes' walk of the Poplar Mission. There are a number of shops in Poplar owned by Chinese, with Chinese hieroglyphics over their doors, and run in regular Chinese fashion. The very reckoning of change is done by enumerators on the counter, after the Old Roman fashion. Gambling-dens are still maintained, and opium-smoking continues. Only those who know the East End realize the harm that has been done in recent years by games of chance on a large scale promoted in some of these Chinese houses

The Chinese are born gamblers. Lotteries still are held. The police vigilantly watch the district, but, in spite of everything that is done, the cunning of the gambler makes it possible for him to indulge his nefarious passion. If they are raided in one house,

they close for a little while, and then start again in another.

Lax came into closer contact with the Chinese when, as a member of the Public Health Committee of the Borough Council, he inspected, sometimes with the Medical Officer and the sanitary staff, the houses of the foreigners. At that time there were no fewer than ninety-three Chinese lodging-houses. An appalling amount of degradation was caused by the intermarrying of the Chinese with English women. The immorality of the whole business was painful and disgusting, and reacted dreadfully on the character of the women. A number of children in the Mission Sunday school were the unfortunate evidence of the inter-racial unions. The slit eyes and high cheek-bones of the Oriental declared their Chinese paternity. The English mothers invariably deteriorated, and the poor children were the helpless sufferers. Happily, owing to the vigilance of the authorities, there has been a welcome change for the better. Evangelical work is carried on by converted Chinese, and, though difficult, good is being accomplished by this foreign mission enterprise in the heart of London. Still, much more needs to be done.

The Strange Story of Sam Koo Ling

One hot July afternoon, hat in hand, Lax was making his way through Chinatown in Poplar to have tea with his friends, Mr. and Mrs. Wilkins. This

was one of his weekly delights in the midst of the depressing and distressing experiences accompanying his pastoral work in that cosmopolitan area. Little did he anticipate that that day he would never reach their home.

As he passed down Pennyfields he saw an elderly Chinaman standing in a doorway. He was a remarkable looking individual, a man of nearly sixty years of age. He was tall and thin. He still wore the pigtail, which he pushed under a dilapidated, wide-brimmed, straw hat. His dirty, bare feet were half-hidden in a pair of leather slippers. A cigarette-end between his lips, his slit eyes half-closed, gave him a cynical expression, as he leaned against the doorpost with his arms folded.

This was Sam Koo Ling. He kept a doss-house Lax had been brought into touch with him on account of his attachment to an Englishwoman, whose family were distressed and disgraced thereby. Moreover, Sam had frequently been in trouble owing to certain breaches of the sanitary laws, and Lax's position on the Public Health Committee made him a constant visitor in that slum area. The house owned by this Chinaman was one of the committee's problems. About forty Chinamen lodged there. They smoked opium freely, they gambled shamelessly, and Sam Koo Ling was frequently in the police court to answer for his misdeeds.

Lax walked down Pennyfields in the brilliant

sunshine, and was wiping his perspiring brow when he came up to the Chinaman.

'Good afternoon!' he said.

'Good afternoon, sir,' replied Sam in a doleful voice, removing his hat by way of salutation.

'I hope you are well, Sam,' suggested Lax.

'Nah, I am not,' answered the Chinaman. 'I am poo'ly: savvy, ill? Savvy, mis'ble?'

This was said with sad gesticulations.

'Sorry to hear that,' said Lax. 'What is the matter? Is it the heat?'

'Oh, hell is on!' was the reply.

'Dear, dear, you *are* in a bad way,' said the minister.

Then, furtively looking over his shoulder and finding the coast clear, in a loud whisper Sam said, 'Lax-ee, will-ee come in?'

'I don't mind,' was the reply.

Lax followed him into the house. As he crossed the threshold he could smell the sweet odour of the opium that was being smoked by a number of Sam's patrons. As he walked along the passage he heard the rattle of the dice as the gamblers threw them on the tables. This was one of the worst houses in Chinatown.

They entered a room at the end of the passage. The Chinaman instantly slammed the door, pushed an old chest of drawers against it, and, facing the minister with a fierce look on his face, took him by the shoulder, and said, 'There is goin' to be murder!'

'Oh,' said Lax, 'and who is going to be murdered?'

'Me!' was the reply.

'And who is going to murder you, Sam?' asked the minister.

'Chinamen! Chinamen!' he answered excitedly, and pointed to the door. 'They are goin' to cut my throat; they are goin' to take my monee. Savvy?'

'Savvy?' he repeated, gazing at Lax inquiringly.

'Yes, I understand,' said Lax. 'Have you got some money, then?'

'Yes, I have some,' he replied sadly.

'Well, why don't you put it in the bank?' Lax suggested.

'Oh, banks would rob poor Chinaman!' he shrieked, with a deprecating gesture.

'Oh, no,' replied the minister reassuringly 'Banks don't rob Chinamen; you would be safe with them.'

'Besides,' Sam went on, 'they are goin' to slit my throat *to-night*!'

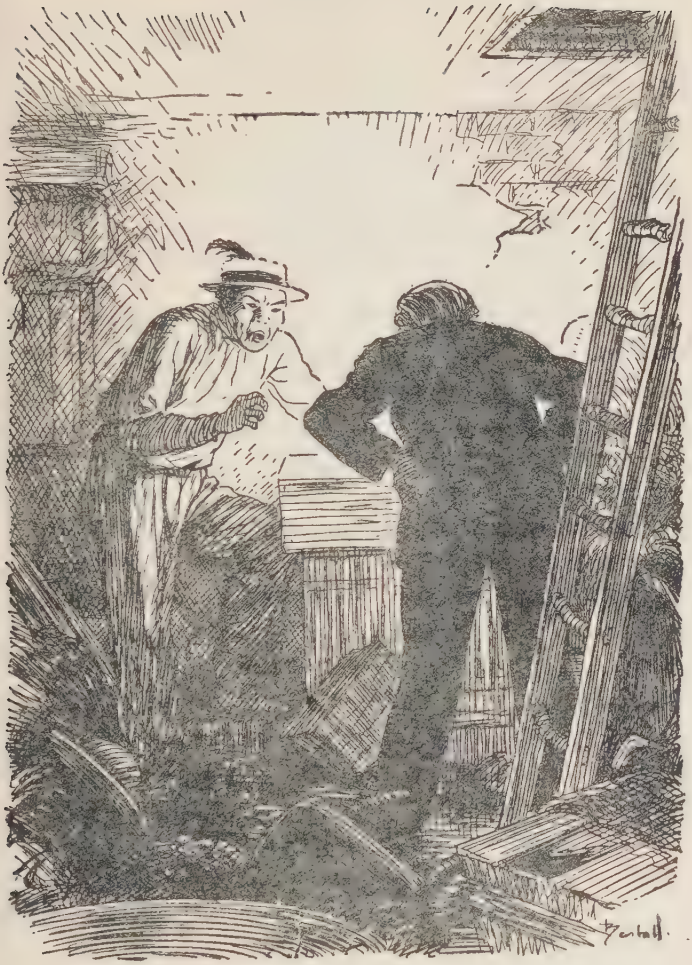
'But why?' inquired Lax in perplexity. 'Why do they want to murder you?'

'They want to steal my monee! Savvy? Friend tells me—they are ready to-night!' cried the distracted Chinaman.

'Well,' said the minister, 'we must try to stop that little proceeding. Where is the money?'

'Down there!' was the reply, pointing towards the floor.

Removing an old piece of carpet, the Chinaman



'IT IS MINE! IT IS MINE! I DID SAVE IT!'

revealed the outline of a trap-door, and, putting his long finger-nails into the crack, lifted it up.

Lax gazed down into the inky darkness, and discerned a precarious step-ladder at his feet.

'The monee is down there,' explained Sam in a hoarse whisper 'Will-ee look?'

'Yes,' the other replied somewhat dubiously, 'I will, if you wish.'

Sam got a candle and lit it. At his request Lax blew out the flame. He then got a saucer, which he adjured Lax to break by smashing it on the floor. Lax's oath had thus been taken, and Sam felt he could trust him with his secret.

Lighting the candle again, he made his way down the ladder. When Sam had reached the bottom, Lax began his perilous descent. Soon they were both on the floor of the underground apartment, almost knee-deep in filth and rubbish. The floor was of earth, and the stench disagreeable beyond words. The Chinaman began to dig among the rubbish, and then to pull and tug at some object, in the meanwhile displacing old rags and papers and sending up showers of dust.

Covering his mouth with his pocket-handkerchief, Lax called out to Sam to make less dust.

'What a dreadful hole, Sam; I've had enough of this,' he said, for one could scarcely breathe in the stifling atmosphere.

By this time he had pulled a box into view It was about two feet in length, and eight or nine inches in

depth. It was well fastened by stout ropes. After a while he disengaged the ropes from the box, and, picking up the candle from the ground, lifted the lid. With astonishment Lax looked into the box. For a moment he couldn't speak a word, for the box was more than half full of sovereigns and half-sovereigns!

'Wherever did you get all this money?' Lax inquired.

'Bus'ness! Bus'ness!' was the reply.

As Lax looked at his gnarled old face, with his slit eyes, his high cheekbones, his yellow skin, his long, dirty teeth, his narrow fingers with clawed finger-nails like the talons of a bird of prey (the miser that he was!), he felt that he was looking upon the most sinister, wicked personality he had ever met.

'It is mine! It is mine! I did save it! And they are going to cut my throat to get my monee—monee—monee!' said Sam, with a hoarse scream.

'Well!' ejaculated Lax, somewhat nonplussed by the strange apparition of the gold in such filthy surroundings. 'Why don't you take this to the bank, so that it may be safe?'

'No, no, no!' he wailed. 'They will rob poor Chinaman.' And he literally hugged the box.

'No, they will not,' reiterated the minister. 'Look here, you pack up that box at once. We have just time to get to the bank. I will help you to carry it. The bank manager will advise you what to do.'

Very reluctantly he began to pack up the box, and soon it was securely fastened. They carried it up the ladder, and at last stood in the room above. Their clothes were covered with dust, and their eyes and mouths coated with the filth.

Rubbing himself vigorously, Lax made himself a little more presentable. Sam removed the chest of drawers and replaced the trap-door, carefully covering it with the old carpet. Each held an end of the box, and so they stepped into the passage. Three or four Chinamen were standing near the door. Their eyes glistened as they saw the box. Hurried whisperings passed from one to the other. They wondered what it all meant. Perhaps they guessed what that mysterious box contained!

The minister and the Chinaman hastened to the bank. Lax sought admission to the manager's office, introduced the Chinaman to him, and explained the reason for their unceremonious entrance. Two young clerks were called in, who quickly unpacked the box. The amazement of the manager may be imagined when this unexpected wealth of gold was disclosed. His eyes opened wide and his face became a note of interrogation as he waited for some explanation.

'The devil!' said the official.

'It is mine! All-ee mine!' said Sam, hovering over the money as a miser hovers over his hoard.

'You old rogue!' said the manager, when at last

he found his voice. 'How many people have you robbed to get this?'

Lax had shrewd suspicions himself that many an unconscious opium-smoker had been robbed; and, very likely, many a body found in the river had been flung there while the victim was unconscious, and that some of those sovereigns had been stolen from the poor wretches

When the hoard was counted it was found to be just over £2,300!

Lax then explained to the bank official that Sam Koo Ling had heard that he was to be murdered, and was naturally alarmed. Moreover, he wanted to return to Hong-Kong. Lax had informed Sam that the money could be deposited in this bank; that it could be transferred to a bank in Hong-Kong; and that Sam might be assured he would receive the money in absolute safety.

'Certainly,' replied the manager; and he explained the procedure to the Chinaman. After this, he asked Sam to withdraw from the office and wait outside until Lax should follow.

The bank manager then turned to Lax, and said, 'Do you know this man?'

'Yes,' Lax replied; 'I have had a great deal to do with him.'

'I do not hesitate to say,' remarked the official, that he is the biggest scoundrel in the East End of London. More crimes may be credited to him, I

should say, than to almost any man in our cosmopolitan area. Ah, well, good luck to you, Mr. Lax, in whatever you do for him ! '

Lax left the bank and joined Sam Koo Ling in the street. He then heard, to his dismay, that the Chinaman was afraid of going to Pennyfields, for most certainly he would be murdered. So he took him to the mission. There they fixed up a bed in one of the rooms, and for five nights Sam Koo Ling slept there the uneasy sleep of the troubled and the worried. He never showed his face outside. By this time a berth was found for him in a steamer sailing from the London Docks to Hong-Kong. He was too nervous to go alone. Lax saw him on board, and gave him words of counsel and warning.

The ship sailed, and Sam Koo Ling went with it Lax never saw him again

Some years afterwards, however, a Poplar sailor told Lax that a strange incident had happened to him in Hong-Kong. He was passing down a street, and a Chinaman who remembered him stopped him excitedly.

' Do-ee know Lax-ee of Poplar? Do-ee know Lax-ee ? ' asked the hysterical Chinaman.

' Yes,' replied the sailor.

' Then will you tell him that Sam Koo Ling is in Hong-Kong, and has the monee? And tell him that Sam Koo Ling thanks him for saving him from murder ! '

That message came to Lax in Poplar. It is the last he has heard of Sam Koo Ling.

Chapter XXI

POPLAR CHILDREN

The children of Poplar are entirely delightful. Whenever and wherever you find them, they are surely the most original and sunny mortals in the world. In their Sunday best or their Saturday worst, in school or street, at home or abroad, they are the same irrepressible little bundles of goodwill. Very early in their lives they learn the happy art of making the best of circumstances. Temperamentally they are always facing east, always waiting for——!

What Poplar would be without the children it is impossible to imagine. Their smiles are sunshine, their happy voices music indeed, while their mental resiliency is something to wonder at. Providence has compensated them handsomely in endowing them with incorrigibly high spirits. Their eagerness and curiosity, their pathetic dependence, their innocence and ignorance, their generosity, their lavish affection—all these are a perpetual source of refreshing to the depressed worker, and he cannot imagine himself existing without them.

Nothing damps the spirits of the Poplar child; nothing quenches his ardour. See him at the annual excursion. He never makes anything of trifles. Does

the heat scorch him? He holds his face up to the sun 'to get brown.' Does the cold freeze him? Nothing could be better, because he won't 'sweat' when the races come on. Does the rain fall in a deluge? Splendid. He gleefully catches the drops in his cap. Is there a thunderstorm? He seriously settles down for fifty seconds to imitate the fury and roar of it. He will *not* allow anything to depress him.

Lax recalls how often he has turned homewards, after a day of disappointing drudgery, feeling that he must give up! Suddenly little hands steal into his, and laughing eyes turn up to his in gleeful recognition. Then all has changed. The love and smiles of the Poplar children had recreated a jaded spirit and made him feel that all was not lost.

Deeply religious, too, is the Poplar child. Religion fascinates him. He loves the sanctuary, and is happy with those who work in it. You may always count on the loyal co-operation of the child in any kind of good work. He will collect for foreign missions, run errands for his teacher, carry out any instructions that give him the feeling of doing something for his Church or school. Alas, that this spirit of generous love for religion has so often to suffer for its devotion! A negligent mother will prepare the Sunday dinner late. Never mind, the child will miss dinner rather than be late for school. Again and again is it recorded by teachers that more than half their classes come to Sunday school dinnerless. But there is no complaint;

no recriminations ever pass their lips. The loyal little souls!

Unfortunately, positive hindrances are sometimes put in their way to prevent them coming to Sunday school. Lax tells of calling at a house to inquire why a boy had been absent from school for three Sundays. It was feared he might be ill. The father answered his knock, and Lax asked sympathetically after the child.

'So my Billy goes to your Sunday school, does he? Well, if he ever goes again I'll break his bloody neck! I'll have none o' that sort o' nonsense! I catched him saying a prayer the other day before he had his dinner, and he said he was thankin' Gawd for his food. I jolly well soon told him that I was the gawd he had to thank for his vittles'—and so on, and so on. No reasoning could prevail with the man; no appeal to the father for the moral training of his child had any effect Such blatant irreligion is not uncommon in Poplar.

And here may be mentioned one of the blessed ministries of children in the homes of spiritual darkness. Again and again the Scriptures are fulfilled. 'And a little child shall lead them.' 'This is my daddy, Mr. Lax,' called out a little girl. 'I've brought him to the Mission.' She would have no refusal, and by loving persistence had gained the day. Eventually she brought the whole family.

The Poplar child loves the minister. Let the man who has no love for children hesitate before going to

work in Poplar, otherwise he will have a bad time of it. There the children charge you in the street, and you must be prepared valiantly to receive the shock if you would retain your balance and your dignity. They chat, laugh, dance by your side, then abruptly, with a knowing little nod, scamper off as fast as their legs can carry them. At times, even to those most devoted, the Poplar child's overflowing affection is apt to prove embarrassing. But it would be torture to the man or woman who had no love for children.

And how smart they are in repartee! They see the point of a question almost before it emerges. Quick in the uptake, they are like lightning itself in aptness of expression.

A brilliant example of this type of boy was Joey Joyce. And who was Joey Joyce? Is it possible that the reader has not been introduced to this diminutive Poplaronian? Then this omission shall be repaired at once. Joey was one of Lax's keenest friends. He was like the minister's shadow. He waylaid him at every corner, always finding some curious question to ask. He was an animated note of interrogation!

They were walking home together one night. The stars were bright, and the constellations plain. Lax, looking up, pointed out the Great Bear.

'Is it true, Mr. Lax, that Gawd can count the stars?' asked the boy.

'Quite true, Joey,' replied the minister. 'He knows all their names, and controls all their movements.'

'Garn, I don't b'lieve it,' retorted Joey. 'Why, if He did that He'd never have any time for breakfast. Why, He'd forget how many He'd counted, and have to keep startin' again!'

Lax assured him that God could, and did, count the stars; indeed, He counted our tears.

'Wot,' exclaimed Joey, with consternation, 'does He count my tears when dad wallops me?'

On another occasion they were walking home rather late. On reaching the Manse, Lax bade Joey good night, and told him not to forget his prayers; for the minister had taught him a prayer, which included 'Gentle Jesus.'

'No, sir,' he said, 'I won't forget my prayers. 'But,' he went on, 'I've dropped the fishy prayer.'

'The fishy prayer!' said Lax. 'Whatever do you mean, Joey?'

'Why,' replied the boy, 'I'm not a kid now, so I don't say, "Give a little child a *plaice*."'

During Lax's mayoralty he and Mrs. Lax visited every elementary school in the borough, and addressed the children on some topic of the day. At one school he said, 'Now, children, you see this gentleman who wears a red robe, and has a beautiful chain round his neck, and carries a cocked hat. Who is he?'

Up went a little girl's hand.

'Well, dear, what do you call this gentleman?' (pointing to himself).

'Please, sir, she cried, 'you are the Lord Mayor's Show!'

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At another school he was addressing the children on 'Heroism.'

'What do you call a brave man?' asked the Mayor.

'A hero, sir,' answered a small boy smartly.

'And a brave woman—what do you call her?'

'*A shero, sir!*' was the reply.

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It was a terribly hot day, and Lax was mopping the perspiration from his face as he walked along a certain back street. A little urchin saw the minister's discomfort, and, running across the footway, saluted with mock solemnity.

'What little animal wouldn't yer like to be now, Mr. Lax?' he queried.

'What little animal?' repeated Lax. 'Why, I shouldn't like to be a fly.'

'A fly's not an animal,' retorted the child, with contempt; 'a fly's a bird.'

'Well, I give it up!' said the minister.

'Yer wouldn't like to be a little 'otter, would yer, sir?' said he, with a knowing wink, and then ran off.

. . . . . .

Lax was speaking to the Band of Hope children on the Ten Commandments.

'What are the Ten Commandments?' he asked.

'Why,' replied a bright young urchin, 'they're them things you've got to keep.'

'Do *you* keep the Ten Commandments?' inquired the minister.

'No, sir,' was the reply 'Teacher keeps them in the cupboard!'

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While visiting one of the very poor schools, Lax noticed a little girl who was a cripple. She could only move with difficulty

'Take my arm,' he said. She blushingly did so. And slowly they walked into the playground.

'What is your name, dear?' he asked.

'Hannah Jesus, sir,' was the reply.

'Hannah Jesus?' Lax repeated, with surprise. 'How do you come to have a name like that?'

'You see,' said the child, 'ever since I had my accident I have felt Jesus knew all about it, and that He would never leave me alone. I shall go to Him soon, so I have asked everybody to call me Hannah Jesus.'

Lax looked at her with astonishment

'How old are you, dear?' he inquired.

'I'm nine,' she replied. 'The accident happened when I was five. The doctor says I shall never walk far, and that I shan't live long. I'm so happy, because I'm going to Jesus.'

He made a note of the address where the child lived, and went to see her parents, who lived in a tenement

building. The mother told him the sad story. The little girl fell from the third floor to the ground and practically broke her spine. For the first two years she was a constant sufferer, and cried nearly all the time.

One morning she awoke, and said, 'Mum, I've seen Jesus, and He said He would help me to bear the pain.'

'The child,' the mother added, 'has never cried from that day to this. She is now in bed. She spends most of her time talking to Jesus.'

Lax constantly visited that dreary dwelling. The family of eight lived in two rooms. The crippled child was like a ray of sunshine. She would play with the toys he brought, and gaze with ecstasy on the picture-books. Most of all, she loved to learn hymns about Jesus. So he taught her 'Jesus, high in glory,' 'Jesus, tender Shepherd, hear Me,' 'There is a green hill far away,' and others. Her memory was tenacious, but her love for Jesus was passionate.

In a little more than six months, with a smile on her face and Lax's hand in hers, little Hannah Jesus went to be with Him whose name she had adopted. And what a welcome she would receive!

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It was a children's service. Lax was addressing a crowd of youngsters on 'Home.'

'How do you spell "Home"?' he asked.

'H-o-m-e, sir,' was the cry, as they spelled out the word.

'Very good!' said the minister.

'Now, who can tell me what "Home" is?' he asked.

There was silence for a minute. Then a little fellow put up his hand.

'Yes, my boy,' said the minister encouragingly.

'Please, sir, it's where muvver is!' was the reply.

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Lax was visiting from door to door. It was a hovel of a home. In it were a mother and three small children. All were filthy and ill-clad. The minister made friends with the little folk, and told them stories. There were also sweets!

One child climbed to his knee.

'Ah, that is lovely,' said the minister, 'I like to see you there.' And he told another story.

'What is your name, dear?' asked Lax.

'Mabs,' was the shy reply.

'Now, Mabs, let me hear you say your prayers; tell me what you say when you pray to Jesus,' said Lax.

Mabs' face wore a look of blank surprise.

'I don't say no prayers, do I, mum,' said the little one, with a sad shake of her head, and appealing to her mother.

'Oh, but you know Jesus, don't you, dear?' Lax went on.

'No, I don't know Jesus,' the child slowly confessed. Then her face suddenly lit up and her eyes danced, as she eagerly exclaimed, '*But I know Charlie Chaplin!*'

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Chapter XXII

POPLAR—BY THE SEA

Nineteen citizens of the United States some time ago went on a tour of the East End of London. They covered roughly thirty miles in a bus, and, incidentally, interrupted many cricket-matches in progress in the streets, and narrowly missed killing a few of the million and one small children who were playing there.

Just before they reached the East India Docks they turned off into a maze of narrow streets, where nearly every housewife was seated on her doorstep and every child was in the roadway. Here everybody was out-of-doors. That is part of the price they pay in summer for making their home in this great and sweltering metropolis.

The bus broke down, and for an hour the tourists wandered on foot along the High Street, going down the side-streets, reaching at last that part of Poplar known as Chinatown. An hour's walk proved to them that Chinatown is no myth but a squalid reality. The report says that they shuddered at some things they saw. One man from the States expressed himself thus: 'I thought I knew London, but——!'

'I have never seen so many children, or such

'Cliff Edge,' Minster.

'POPLAR-BY-THE-SEA.'

beautiful children, in all my life,' said a sad-faced American matron, after the party returned West.

'It's sure a big proposition—a tremendous problem,' said a man who bore all the signs of having had his eyes opened.

The foregoing is taken from an article in an American magazine, written by a member of the party of American citizens

Those who have lived for years in Poplar have been conscious of the truth of most of the statements made. Alas, that it should be possible to be so near to such a state of things and yet not be so thoroughly appalled as to make it impossible to live in it! Familiarity, in more ways than one, breeds contempt. The veil of nearness after a time hides the ugliness of the real.

One thing is certain. Civilization owes a tremendous debt to the children. The very fact of being born in an overcrowded city at once puts the child at a great disadvantage.

We know, says Lax, what we owe to the children who are born in a community of eight million people. We owe them green fields, open spaces, and beautiful gardens. We owe them a sight of God's glorious country. We owe them that health and strength which alone can come from pure air and fair scenes.

Garden cities may come in time. Meanwhile we have to do the best we can. The Church of God is not only a great spiritual agency, it *is* a great

humanitarian agency. We have to think, not only of men's souls, but of the bodies those souls inhabit. Hence we praise God for all the manifold agencies that touch the lives of the people on the human side, and particularly those which affect the children.

It is true the State can do much, but the Church can do what the State, with all its machinery, cannot do. The Church's motive is different. The State, according to some people's ideas, should become a horn of plenty, from which every want and wish can be anticipated and supplied. Yes, but invariably there is about its operations a soullessness that produces selfishness and cynicism. The Church, acting from the motive of love, in the Spirit of Christ, produces an entirely different result. Lax has ever insisted that the system may be changed, and yet everything go from bad to worse. Things can never be right until the man is right. Poplar has many within its borders who are obsessed with the idea of changing systems. Lax still sticks to his profound conviction that any system could be trusted if the man behind it were transformed, but with the man wrong at heart he would trust no system. So he is out, all the time, to get the man right with God.

While all this controversy about methods has been going on, enlightened souls, working in these unlovely areas, have been toiling hard to do their best to mitigate the conditions, and enlarge the boundaries, of the lives of the children of Poplar.

During the past quarter of a century thousands of children, many of them frail and delicate, have enjoyed a fortnight at the seaside or in the country during the long summer days, or for one golden day have run wild among the bracken and bushes, the flowers and trees, of Epping Forest, that stately and beneficent 'lung' fixed so providentially near to the millions of the East End. Such an experience is an untold boon to them. Their rapture is pathetic. The joys that come as a matter of course to many other children, who are more happily situated, are so rare as to produce positive ecstasy. The sight of cows and sheep, the vision of growing corn, the miracle of trees laden with precious fruit, are things that produce something akin to a delirium of rapture in these little mites.

For years Lax had been looking for a suitable place where a house could be acquired as a rest and holiday home for sick children and their mothers.

The necessity for this house was urgent. Many a child has been months in a state of convalescence after illness, when, if it could only have had a fortnight or three weeks at the seaside, with plain, simple food, it would have been well in a month. The tragedy of a delicate slum child touches the tender heart with acute poignancy.

The difficulty in securing such a home of rest lay in the fact that three or four considerations were of primary importance. First, it must not be too large.

Second, it must be in a quiet part of the coast, away from the temptations of the average seaside resort. Third, the air must be bracing. Fourth, it must be within easy reach of London

Such a house came into Lax's hands quite providentially. It is ideally situated in an 'undeveloped' part of Kent—Minster-on-Sea, near Sheerness. It is close to the sea; indeed, it is called 'Cliff Edge,' a name that is strictly suitable, for one could throw a stone into the water from the garden gate!

Beginning in a modest way, the house has been furnished plainly. The utmost economy has been exercised in every direction. But the Poplar and Bow Mission is now in possession of a 'home from home' for those frail and sickly little mites whose bodies and minds pine for sea breezes after exhausting sickness. Nothing that Lax has done in the long years of service in Poplar has moved him with such a glad sense of satisfaction as the provision of this beneficent institution, by which sick little ones may be helped back to the health they have lost.

But a further consideration is present to Lax's mind. The restoration of the child's physical health is important, and the provision of an environment that will promote its innocent happiness an ideal to be desired. There is, however, another and a higher consideration to be remembered. Many of these little ones come from 'homes' of pagan darkness. The language, the example, the 'atmosphere,' are all

inimical to that moral development which alone will produce a high character and a worthy citizen. The brief hours spent in Sunday School and sanctuary are veritably bits of heaven to the child spirit. How it revels in the services and worship of God! It is profoundly true, ' Heaven lies about us in our infancy ' Alas, to be returned to such a ' home ' is something like condemning the child to spiritual death.

Lax's hope is to have the child for a delectable fortnight, blessing its body by simple food, bracing air, and rollicking games. But, even more, to introduce the child to the life of a Christian household, to teach it the elementary lessons of courtesy and kindness, to implant in its tender heart reverence for good things, and to familiarize its mind with the joys of family prayer and praise. Such a fortnight would be fourteen days of ecstasy! The little one would never forget it, and in many cases it would be the beginning of a new life to body and soul.

EPILOGUE

THE triumphs of science in dealing with waste matter so that it becomes useful and even beautiful are now a commonplace. Civilization is being enriched and human life blessed by the long-withheld secrets of Nature now revealed. To-day we know that nothing is lost, nothing is really wasted. There is some use for every substance. As the frontiers of scientific knowledge are pushed farther back, humanity enters into its rich and glorious heritage. The ugly is being made beautiful, the sterile fruitful, and the useless thing valuable for service.

What has all this to do with Poplar? Well, if what we look upon as so much dirt and rubbish can become beautiful and valuable, and the useless serviceable in the realm of physical science, what cannot human salvage do? Miracles are possible not in the physical realm only. In a Mission such as that which has been described in these pages, men and women who have been flung on the scrap-heap have been rescued, and many of them literally re-created. Where the conditions seem most hopeless, where effort, and ambition, and perseverance seem hardly worth while, some of the finest virtues flourish and some of the greatest victories are won.

But by what means is this miracle of human renewal made possible? At this point many voices are raised and many theories propounded.

Psychology now claims to displace the saving grace of Christ, and puts in the counter-claim of ability to do all that the Christian religion has been doing for ages. This is a new aspect in the controversy, and creates greater difficulties than it professes to cure.

Dr. Garvie has truly said, 'at the present hour it is psychology which is the most dangerous menace to the Christian view of life, as biology was in a former generation and geology in an earlier time.' To put the point in another way, we have escaped domination by nineteenth-century matter only to become the slaves of our subconscious selves.

This will not do. There is no warrant for it, either in the facts of history, of human nature, or of common experience. The highest knowledge has proclaimed for ages that there is nothing inherent in human nature adequate to the renewal of character and the re-shaping of destiny. It is the old controversy over again. Christ gave the solution to the problem when He said, 'For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which is lost.' The power equal to the task of saving men must come from above As our fathers sang:

None but Jesus can do helpless sinners good.

Lax tells the story of crossing the Thames by Kew Bridge, and looking over the parapet at the stream

below. What a disappointing view of the great river! Said he, 'Is this the Thames of art, of poetry, of history?' Why, it was a mere discreditable trickle. Many a village brook would have put it to shame. Three barges lay stranded on the muddy bed of the river; the little island looked like a bunch of faded flowers flung away; and the rowing-boats were scattered in every conceivable attitude of disorder and disarray. It was a disappointing sight!

He went his way. A few hours later he returned. Again he looked over the parapet. Ah, what a change! This time the tide had come in, and, with that brimming fulness of the Thames at its best, everything was lifted into beauty. The barges carried themselves like stately liners, the island looked like flowers upon a well-laid table, the rowing-boats stood like cavalry horses tethered to their posts.

That is a parable. Humanity can be bitterly disappointing, and frequently is. The revelations of human perfidy are sometimes beyond belief. Under certain circumstances one may be forgiven for saying with the cynic, 'When I see men and their ways the more do I love my dog.'

Wherein is the hope of humanity's ennoblement? In the rising tide of divine power, and the recognition of the place of Christ in the life of man. We need to re-discover Christ.

One final story.

Lax was one day taking tea with one of the families

of the Poplar Mission. Father, mother, two children, and Lax formed the little party. Presently, another friend joined them. He was an amateur conjurer.

'Would you like to see me make a ha'penny into a sovereign?' said he to the children.

'Yes,' was the reply. To that interesting proposition the whole party was agreeable.

The conjurer took a halfpenny, placed it in the palm of his hand, closed his fingers over it. Genuflexions and mysterious mutterings. Then he cried, 'Hey, presto, pass!' He opened his hand, and lo there was a sovereign.

'Do it again!' said the children, filled with wonder.

Again the conjurer set to work, and again, when he opened his hand, there was, not a halfpenny, but a sovereign!

'Wonderful! Wonderful!' cried the party. It *was* wonderful.

'Why,' cried Lax, 'I've seen that done again and again in the realm of grace.'

Christ was no conjurer. He was no deceiver. But for a quarter of a century in Poplar he has been taking poor, valueless copper and turning it into gold. He has taken halfpenny men into His blessed hand, and, before He has let them go, has transformed them into sovereign characters with the King's image on them! Human nature is never so grand as when it has been in the Master's hand.

This book is the modest declaration of the greatness of Christ's claims and the glory of His achievements.

In that noble sixth chapter of St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians, and the ninth verse, is the charter for the modern Church's crusade among all sorts and conditions of men:

'Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the Kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the Kingdom of God. *And such were some of you:* but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.'

The Church of Christ is to be adorned by those who have been transformed by divine power—the ugly made beautiful, the waste made useful.

Christ claims to make C3 men into A1 men. Indeed, He says He will make a C3 race into an A1 race! 'He is able also to save them to the utter most that come unto God by Him!'

'HE SHALL SEE OF THE TRAVAIL OF HIS SOUL AND SHALL BE SATISFIED'